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*" Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
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JEAN FRANÇOIS REGNARD.
Engraved by Aug. St. Aubin.

[*Front.*

Broadway Translations

FRENCH COMEDIES OF THE
XVIIITH CENTURY

REGNARD—*THE RESIDUARY LEGATEE*

LESAGE—*TURCARET OR THE FINANCIER*

MARIVAUX—*THE GAME OF LOVE AND CHANCE*

DESTOUCHES—*THE CONCEITED COUNT*

Translated by

RICHARD ALDINGTON

With an Introduction and Biographical Prefaces

With four full-page portraits

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LIST OF BOOKS CONSULTED¹

I: GENERAL

- (1) *Le Théâtre Italien de Gherardi, ou le Recueil General de toutes les Comédies et Scènes Françoises jouées par les Comédiens Italiens du Roy, &c.* 6 vols. 1700.
- (2) *Causeries du Lundi; and Portraits Littéraires.* C. A. de Sainte-Beuve. 27 vols., and 3 vols. 1829-1868.
- (3) *La Comédie en France au XVIIIe Siècle.* C. Lenient. 2 vols. 1888.
- (4) *Dix-Huitième Siècle, Études Littéraires.* E. Faguet. 1890.
- (5) *Histoire du Théâtre François, &c.* [F. & C. Parfaict]. Vols. XIV, XV., 1748, 1749.
- (6) *Histoire Générale du Théâtre en France.* Eugène Lintilhac. Vols. iii, iv. 1908, 1909.
- (7) *Histoire de la Littérature Française.* L. Clarétie. Vol iii, 2nd Edition. 1907.
- (8) *Les Spectacles de la Foire, &c.* Par Émile Campardon. 2 vols. 1877.
- (9) *Acteurs et Actrices du Temps Passé.* La Comédie Française. Ad. Lalauze. 1881.
- (10) *Acteurs et Actrices d'Autrefois.* Arthur Pougin. 1896.
- (11) *French Stage in the 18th Century.* F. Hawkins.
- (12) *La Comédie Française de 1680 à 1900.* A. Joannidès.
- (13) *Répertoire Générale du Théâtre Français.* 1813.
- (14) *Les Comédiens du Roi.* E. Campardon.
- (15) *French Classics. Plays,* 5 vols. G. Masson.

¹This list is incomplete. It does not include the works of any French or English dramatist cited in the Introductions. On the other hand it contains several books which have supplied little more than a fact or a date. There are quantities of other books dealing generally with the French stage or some aspect of French dramatic literature. See Bibliographies in M. Lintilhac's *Histoire Générale du Théâtre en France*.

II : REGNARD

- (1) *Œuvres de J. F. Regnard.* 1825.
- (2) *Œuvres Complètes de Regnard.* 2 vols. (Fournier ed.) 1875.
- (3) *Théâtre de Regnard, Poésies Diverses, &c.* (Moland ed.) 1893.
- (4) *La Provençale de J. F. Regnard.* (E. Pilon ed.) 1920.
- (5) *Le Poète J. Fr. Regnard et son Château de Grillon.* Joseph Guyot. 1907.
- (6) *Bibliographie et Iconographie des Œuvres de Regnard.* 1878.

III : MARIVAUX

- (1) *Œuvres Complètes de M. de Marivaux.* 1781.
- (2) *Théâtre de Marivaux.* (Garnier ; no date).
- (3) *La Vie de Marianne.* (Ed. Duviquet) ; (Garnier ; no date).
- (4) *Le Spectateur Français.* (Ed. P. Bonnefon). 1921.
- (5) *Marivaux et le Marivaudage.* J. Fleury. 1881.
- (6) *Marivaux, sa Vie et ses Œuvres.* G. Larroumet. 1882.
- (7) *Marivaux.* Gaston Deschamps. 1921. (3rd edition).
- (8) *Marivaux.* T. S. Eliot. "Art and Letters." 1919.

IV : LESAGE

- (1) *Œuvres de Lesage.* 1783.
- (2) *Théâtre de Lesage.* Notice. 1850.
- (3) *Lesage.* Eugène Lintilhac. 1893.
- (4) *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library.* Vol. iv : Sir Walter Scott's Introduction to *Gil Blas*.
- (5) *Éloge de Lesage.* A. Malitourne.
- (6) *Éloge de Lesage.* H. J. G. Patin.
- (7) *Turcaret.* ed. A. Hamilton Thompson. 1918.

V : DESTOUCHES

- (1) *Œuvres.* Néricault Destouches.
- (2) *Théâtre Choisie.* Destouches. Notice par M. Édouard Thierry.
- 3) *Philippe Néricault Destouches.* J. Hankiss. 1918.

FOUR FRENCH COMEDIES

INTRODUCTION

I

At the outset the limits to this book must be defined. Its purpose is to give specimens of the best French comedies in the period between Molière and Beaumarchais. The four plays translated are those usually considered by critics as the masterpieces of their authors and the finest comedies of their age. Opinions may easily differ about this—for example, some critics think Regnard's "*Joueur*" better than the play given here—but the authority for the choice is considerable. It would have been pleasant to include a play of Dancourt's, Gresset's *Le Méchant*, Piron's *Métromanie*, something of Voltaire, a specimen of Nivelle de la Chaussée, some one-act plays, an example of the lesser-known pieces from the Comédie des Italiens, some of the "*pièces de la Foire*"—but French comedies in the 18th century are so numerous that an adequate selection would need a whole series of volumes. The choice, therefore, was limited to plays which are very highly esteemed in France, three of which are still performed by the Comédie Française.

The method of arrangement is chronological. A short, and necessarily imperfect, note on French comedy in the 18th century will give the reader who comes fresh to the subject some little information; those who desire to know more will find their thirst for information fully gratified if they will consult the volumes mentioned in the list of books consulted. Since people like to know what kind of

a person a writer was, a brief life of each dramatist has been prefixed to each play. Care has been taken to make these as accurate as possible ; and in each case the latest and most authentic researches available have been utilised. A very brief analysis of each play has been added, pointing out the characteristic defects and qualities.

II

In writing on this subject for English readers, there is much the same difficulty as a Frenchman finds when introducing the Elizabethan dramatists to his countrymen. Dramatic taste is a very nice thing, and national feeling and prejudice count for more than is usually supposed. We are apt to think that anyone who does not understand and admire Shakespeare is an idiot ; the French think anyone who does not understand and admire Racine is an idiot. But the fact remains that most Englishmen fail to understand Racine and most Frenchmen fail to understand Shakespeare. In spite of those who are so certain they are competent to decide off-hand whether a play is good or bad, I am ready to assert that quite ten years of study of French are needed before one begins to comprehend the greatness of Racine. Comedy is much easier, because while we have no successful English tragedy modelled on Racine, we have many good comedies of the school of Molière—Congreve's and Goldsmith's, for instance. And then the modern English drama is dominated, consciously or unconsciously, by French models which have been evolved from the Molière play. When an Englishman thinks of tragedy—if he ever does think of anything so remote—he thinks of Shakespeare. When he thinks of comedy, he thinks of Mr. Shaw ; and Mr. Shaw knows a great deal about French comedy.

The key to the whole situation is, of course, the comedy

of Molière. And it is a curious thing that, while we are always talking about Shakespeare's genius and about the "glory" of other Elizabethans, we never seem to notice that the Shakespearian tradition is dead, while the tradition of Molière, as it has been variously developed, swamps Europe as it has done for more than two centuries. The reason perhaps is that the Shakespearian play demands great imagination and genius or it is a mere botch; while the Molière play, though only supremely good in the hands of genius, can be made successful merely by intelligence and talent. I have no room to pursue this fascinating subject here but before dropping it, I should like to leave a query for those who are so certain the Shakespeare tradition is inferior to that of Molière. Why is it when we read an Elizabethan play that we visualise it not on the stage but in the world, while, when we read Molière, or any of his innumerable dramatic progeny, we are forced to visualise actors on a stage, not men and women? Is it not the same with Greek plays? Prometheus for us is chained upon Caucasus, not upon a stage rock; the sentinel stands on the watch-tower of Agamemnon's palace, not on stage-scenery at Athens. Do we visualise the Cloud-Maidens of Aristophanes as a stage chorus or do we not rather see them in their white trailing garments sweeping up from the sea along the sides of some scarped hill? Who in reading a French play ever lost the sensation that it is an artificial imitation of life to be performed as a dramatic spectacle? May it not be that the importance of stage-craft has been exaggerated, that, dazzled by the stage virtuosity of Molière and his followers, dramatists have come to compose more competent dramatic spectacles, but have ceased to write dramatic literature?

At any rate, the reader will be troubled by no "purple patches," no bursts of poetry, no flights of imagination, in these days. He will meet with plenty of improbability of a farcical or perhaps merely unskilful sort. And he will

meet with plenty of wit and mirth of a slightly heartless kind, plenty of plain observation of ordinary human failings, psychology of a primitive sort and considerable skill in stage-craft. That at least we can claim for these comedies and perhaps something more. They write, indeed, as Sir Walter Scott says of Molière, "to the understanding and not to the fancy," for even Marivaux is fanciful in a manner very different from the Elizabethans Scott had in mind when drawing the distinction. But, as he goes on to say, Molière—and, in a lesser degree, these his followers—do possess an almost universal power, "from their truth and from their simplicity; from their powerful and penetrating view of human nature, which could strip folly and vice of all their disguise, and expose them to laughter and scorn when they most hoped for honour and respect."

I have purposely quoted this praise of Molière from Scott, because there is no greater tribute to an author than his ability to compel admiration from writers with a totally different conception of the art. French critics always take it for granted that Molière was the greatest comic genius that ever lived and they think they have conferred immortality upon their lesser writers of comedy by saying a play is almost worthy of Molière. This attitude is the merest bardolatry. But two interesting points emerge. One is that Molière has been and still is extremely popular in France, and, consequently, to a less extent, his 18th century followers; the other is that although the method of Molière has triumphed in the modern theatre abroad, his plays are far less admired than they were a century ago. How often is Molière now played in London?

Let us look at this a little more closely. The *Comédie Française* has a record of all its performances since the 17th century and they have been tabulated by an enthusiast. From these figures it is plain that Molière is by far the most popular of all French classic dramatists, and

that the most popular of all French plays is *Tartuffe*. The significance of the latter fact is interesting but does not now concern us. The following figures of performances will show how immensely Molière precedes all other French dramatists : Molière, 21,647 ; Racine, 6,753 ; Dancourt, 5,556 ; Regnard, 5,390 ; Corneille, 5,241. Molière has three times as many performances as the next dramatist, who is Racine ; Dancourt and Regnard both precede Corneille. Can anything be more significant of the French preference for comedy of the Molière type ? For—it cannot be too often repeated—even those 18th century dramatists, who, like Marivaux, reacted against Molière and pretended to dislike him, are profoundly influenced by him, exist only because he existed.

Now, let us look at Molière's reputation in England. At the present day he receives lip-service of the bardolatry sort, but I venture to assert he is considerably less read and admired now than in the 18th century. Since the Romantic movement we are much less under the direct literary hegemony of France, and those who read old plays are just as likely to prefer Aristophanes or even Shakespeare as comic dramatists. Speaking from personal preference only, I must say that I enjoy Falstaff more than anything in Molière, that the tragi-comedy in the third act of *King Lear* seems to me a flight incomparably beyond *Tartuffe* and *Don Juan*, that I read Molière more or less as farce. If power to provoke laughter be the test of comedy—I am not prepared to say it is, even though Johnson thought so—then I am bound to confess that I laugh more at a brilliant farce like *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* than at "hautes comédies" like *Tartuffe* and *Le Misanthrope*. The modern realists daff aside *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with a snort—"fairy tales !" Well, let us cheerfully admit it and pray Heaven to send us more such "fairy tales," though we may privately doubt whether the realists could supply them. But even here—to express

once more a purely personal taste—I relish Bottom and Snug rehearsing quite as much as the spectacle of poor Porceaugnac being chivvied about the stage with large syringes to the tune of “ piglialo su.”

In the 18th century the superiority of Molière was accepted in England without question. *The Adventurer* for February 12th, 1754, contains an article by Warton, comparing “ ancient ” and “ modern ” authors. Now, Warton knew English literature better, perhaps, than any other man of his age, and he is rightly considered as a precursor of the Romantic revival, which took Shakespeare as its idol. This is what he says of Molière :

“ To these three celebrated ancients [i.e. Aristophanes, Plautus, Terence] I venture to oppose singly the matchless Molière, as the most consummate master of comedy that former or later ages have produced. He was not content with painting obvious and common characters, but set himself closely to examine the numberless varieties of human nature ; he soon discovered every difference, however minute ; and by a proper management could make it striking ; his portraits, therefore, though they appear to be new, are yet discovered to be just. The *Tartuffe* and the *Misanthrope* are the most singular, and yet, perhaps, the most proper and perfect characters that comedy can represent ; and his *Miser* excels that of any other nation. He seems to have hit upon the true nature of comedy ; which is, to exhibit one singular and unfamiliar character, by such a series of incidents as may best contribute to show its singularities. All the circumstances in the *Misanthrope* tend to manifest the peevish and captious disgust of the hero ; all the circumstances in the *Tartuffe* are calculated to show the treachery of an accomplished hypocrite. I am sorry that no English writer of comedy can be produced as a rival to Molière : although it must be confessed that Falstaff and Morose are two admirable characters, excellently supported and displayed.”

Who will say "Amen" to that? Who will agree that the "true nature of comedy" is "to exhibit one singular and unfamiliar character, by such a series of incidents as may best contribute to show its singularities?" It cuts out romantic comedy, the comedy of intrigue and the comedy of sentiment. But that was the accepted idea of comedy in the 18th century upon which many English comedies of the age were produced; and even the Romantic revival, which so effectually disposed of the tradition of Racine (too much so, in my opinion) merely modified the tradition of Molière. Since Congreve, the best writers of comedy in English have been Irishmen; Goldsmith, Sheridan, Wilde, Synge, and Mr. Shaw. The first two are obviously in the direct tradition of Molière; have the other three escaped? I think not. Whether we do or do not see and read Molière's plays as frequently and with as much appreciation as our forefathers, there can be little doubt that the tradition of European comedy is still the tradition of Molière. And the tradition of Shakespeare and the Elizabethans is lost.

Molière died in 1673. It was at once obvious that his place could not be filled. But French drama was organised by Louis XIV and gradually it became apparent that although France did not produce another Molière, the tradition created by that great man did produce first class writers of comedy. Molière's troupe was amalgamated with another and in 1689 took the name of *Comédie Française* and moved into a new theatre in the rue Neuve des Fossés Saint-Germain. The *Comédie Française* had a virtual monopoly of the drama, a fact which neutralised the undoubted benefits of a subsidised national theatre. Its only rivals were the *Comédie Italienne* and the "théâtre de la foire." The unfortunate actors who performed for the benefit of the people at the great fairs of Saint-Germain and Saint-Laurent were persecuted almost

out of existence by the Comédie Française. Their ingenuity and vitality were remarkable. They produced puppet-plays when actors were forbidden. Then dialogue was forbidden and Favart wrote dramatic monologues and Lesage invented vaudeville. The actors performed in dumb show ; placards were let down from the roof of the building showing appropriate verses in large letters, the orchestra struck up some well-known tune to which the verses had been written and the audience sang them. But the handicap was too great and in spite of the genius of Favart and Lesage, no really great work emerged from the fairs.

The Italiens were more formidable rivals. Troupes of Italian players had visited Paris since the days of Henri II, giving Italian plays only until as late as 1668, when, the knowledge of Italian declining in Paris, they began to add French scenes to Italian plays and finally produced almost complete French plays. The success of the Italiens was due not so much to their plays as to their marvellous acting. It must be remembered that at first they mainly played the "Commedia dell' Arte." The author merely sketched a plot, indicated scenes and characters and left the actors to supply the dialogue. This obviously gave the actors far more importance than the dramatist and the result was brilliant acting. Gherardi relates that a famous Scaramuccia kept an audience laughing for a quarter of an hour without uttering a word. The "fixed characters"—Harlequin, Colombine, Scaramouch, the Doctor, and so on—were indeed adapted to French requirements ; but the law of syncretism inevitably caused a certain absorption of Italian methods in the French stage. We can see this in the horse-play of Molière's farces and in the more or less "fixed characters" of French comedies, the Lisettes and Frontins, who are always chamber-maids and valets, just as the Orgons and Madame Argantes are always fathers and mothers of

marriageable daughters, while the Erastes and Isabelles are always lovers.

But the Italiens had no easy time either and were persecuted by the Comédie Française. In 1697 they were suppressed and not reconstituted until 1716. In 1723, they became the "King's Italian Players," but in 1767 they were forcibly amalgamated with the Opéra Comique—and disappeared. The importance of the Italiens, apart from their influence upon French acting and comedy, lay in the fact that they constituted the one opposition to the Comédie Française and were both a nursery for young dramatists and a refuge for those who rebelled against the rigid tradition of Molière. Most of the early work of Regnard and Dufresny was performed by the Italiens and Marivaux distinctly preferred them. It was most unfortunate that the Italiens had not been recalled in 1710, when Lesage quarrelled with the Comédie Française. Had they existed he would not have been forced to write crude vaudeville for the fairs and, with his satirical verve, might have created a whole string of masterpieces like *Turcaret*. ✓

Such was the state of the French theatres at the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries. After Molière's death the troupe of French actors for some time produced none but mediocre plays. Boileau used to declare that since Molière's death they had done nothing and that only the Italiens produced anything worth seeing. And for once the old satirist was right. While there is nothing absolutely first-rate among the fifty odd pieces in Gherardi's *Théâtre Italien*, there are plenty of those bright scenes of social satire in which the French dramatists excel. The best of these came from Nolant de Fatouville, Regnard and Dufresny. Some of the pieces by Regnard are particularly brilliant. Lentilhac is right when he says that students of French comedy pay too little attention to Gherardi's collection. In spite of numerous crudities, of the fact that the earlier volumes mostly con-

tain detached scenes only, the collection is extremely worth reading to anyone who enjoys French comedy. The suppression of the Italiens in 1697—due to a satire on Mme. de Maintenon—is most regrettable. They were an admirable foil to the pedantry of the Comédie Française.

The first dramatist of any considerable ability who attached himself to the Comédie Française troupe was Dancourt. He was a man of good family and both he and his wife were excellent actors. He joined the company in 1685; his first play, *Le Notaire Obligeant*, was produced in the same year, and in 1687 appeared *Le chevalier à la Mode*. For many years he was spokesman for the troupe and the anecdote about Dancourt and Louis XIV is often repeated: Dancourt was talking to the King and was walking backwards to avoid turning his back on the King; he came to the top of a stairway and was about to fall down and break his neck when his Majesty, with that ineffable graciousness characteristic of him, deigned to touch the actor's arm and remark: "Take care Dancourt you will fall." Such was the high estimation in which Dancourt was held at Versailles. He was a prolific writer which explains the large number of performances to his credit but his plays have rarely if ever been seen on the stage in the last fifty years. Yet his *Chevalier à la Mode* is a rattling comedy of character and intrigue, quite the best between Molière and Regnard, and several of his one-act plays are clever and amusing if rather slight.

Dancourt is important in two or three respects. His comedies helped to turn the Comédie Française away from its devotion to tragedy, and their prose form was at least a protest against the pedantic insistence that a comedy must be in five acts in verse. The five acts were still adhered to but the convention of verse (which in most French comedies is merely rhymed prose) was shaken. More important than this was the turn Dancourt gave to

the satire of morals in comedy. He brought observation of life up to date. The society which Molière had worked from was disappearing and in *Dancourt* we see the beginning of a new period. What was happening is briefly this. Richelieu and Mazarin had centralised all power in the monarch. The people were absolutely unrepresented and had no share in the government except that they paid the taxes ; the great nobles were curtailed in their power though retaining many privileges and much " gloire." Louis XIV was the fountain-head of all preferment and consequently Versailles became the hunting-ground of ambition and a positive hot-bed of cynicism and corruption. Needless to say, there were honest men at Versailles but Louis showed his distrust of the nobles by choosing many of his ministers from a lower rank of society. At the same time, the nobility were growing poorer and the expenditure of the government had vastly enriched a whole set of financiers, many of whom were rather shady characters. The struggle between the new rich and the nobles was bitter, exasperated by the fact that " men of quality " were often compelled by their poverty to marry into the families of the new rich. But whatever their differences, nobles and financiers were agreed in vices and in contempt for those who could not rival them. Louis tried to counter-balance this by introducing religion into Versailles ; he only succeeded in adding hypocrisy to the other vices. The progress of corruption was not rapid but it went on ; first, during the old King's reign, under a veil of decorum, then, after his death, breaking out almost in orgies of cynical debauchery.

Naturally the nation enjoyed satires directed against the upper classes in these circumstances and naturally there was a reaction. The four plays given here to some extent represent these varying aspects of society. Regnard is not bitter ; he merely shows us in his exuberant way the unscrupulous intriguing for an old man's money.

His play, at best, is a witty farce, but, if this is not over-fanciful, one may see in it a kind of allegory of a new France impatiently waiting for the old King to die so that it can amuse itself without pretending to be religious. The next, Lesage's "Turcaret," is the honest man's protest against this wave of debauchery. Marivaux marks the reaction; his fine sentiment is a protest against the cynicism and consequent ennui of the Regency. Destouches again becomes an excess and we see in him the beginning of that mawkishness of sentiment which, in spite of Voltaire, taints the middle of the 18th century.

One must not carry this kind of interpretation too far. Society has much the same vices in most periods, much the same faults and inconveniences occur in all forms of government; but the vices and display of the French aristocracy at this period contrasted bitterly with the misery of the people, the defects and abuses of the government, particularly in fiscal matters, were staggering. In 1709, the French system of government was bankrupt, actually and figuratively; the marvel is that the goodness and patience of the French people endured another eighty years of it. There can be no doubt that French comedy was deeply influenced by the state of society. One of the "rules" for French comedy was to hold up to ridicule the vices of the age. The immorality and pride of the nobles, the exactions of the financiers, the social conflict between the two classes, the resulting demoralisation of men and women, provide the themes of many satirical comedies of the 18th century. The role of the valet is an important one in these comedies. He is generally a rogue but an exceedingly clever one; at first, as in Molière's *Etourdi*, for example, he uses his wits entirely for his master, but gradually he begins to use them for himself. To trace the gradual emancipation from Molière's *Mascarille* to the famous declaration of Figaro is a favourite occupation of French critics. They love to notice as they read these

comedies the gathering indications of the terrific storm of 1789.

The comedy of Regnard is full in the tradition of Molière. True, his early plays were written for the Italiens, but when his success had opened the Comédie Française to him he soon showed that, like Dancourt before him, he could write admirably in this style. We have asserted that the genius which is needed for success in the imaginative tradition of Shakespeare is not so essential in the tradition of Molière. Regnard, Destouches, Marivaux, Lesage, even, were not men of vast powers; they were intelligent writers, sharp observers, witty, but in a sense superficial. Mr. T. S. Eliot describes the comedy of Ben Jonson as "two-dimensional art;" that happy phrase exactly describes French comedy, except on its peaks—Molière and Beaumarchais. It lacks profundity. But within its limits, how brilliant it is, how clever and witty, how amusing! And how extraordinarily prolific this tradition of Molière has been! Even before the vast output of the 19th century, the repertory of the Comédie Française (including tragedies) fills collections of fifty, sixty, and in one case two hundred volumes. But this very vitality has proved disastrous. Where there are so many plays, and among these so many that are good, the mind flags at the very thought of investigating them. French comedy is a life study. At best one can but pick out a few authors and a few score plays which are chiefly commended by those who are supposed to have read them all.

Regnard is the "spoiled child" of French classic critics. He has the qualities they admired in comedy. He obeys the "rules" of the Molièresque tradition and his inexhaustible wit is peculiarly gay and French. The objection which might be made by an Englishman that all his comedies are essentially farces, would not in the

least disturb the French classic critic—did not Molière write farces and impart a vein of farcical improbability to even his greatest comedies of character? But what the classic critics really admired in Regnard was his style; they can go on for hours about it. Indeed Regnard's style is delightful, so brilliant, so rapid, so neat, so dextrous, so perfectly appropriate to its ends and so exactly suited to the language. The translator of Regnard may as well admit that his best efforts give but a miserable reproduction of the sparkling original. But Regnard has other qualities than those of style. Even in the most cultivated nation style alone will never secure popularity for a dramatist and Regnard was popular, and is performed to this day. *The Residuary Legatee* has been played 960 times between 1708 and 1920; not a large number certainly compared with *Chu Chin Chow* and similar masterpieces, but not contemptible considering how many good comedies France has and that the original "run" of 23 performances was considered quite exceptionally long. French critics with their delight in analysis, have discovered infinite explanations of Regnard's popularity; but the principal secrets of his success are his command of stage-craft and stage-effects and his inexhaustible gaiety. France is a glum land compared with what it was two centuries ago, for only a nation without rights and hence without political responsibilities has the time and heart to amuse itself thoroughly. However much old France might resent the "tyranny" of King, nobles, and financiers, it felt consoled by laughing—at them as much as it dared, and, if not, by laughing at anything. Regnard was personally an uncommonly gay individual; it was always the ludicrous side of things which struck him, as even to this day it is apt to strike the Parisian. When he was in Lapland he nearly got into a serious scrape by his uncontrollable laughter at the quaint ceremonies of a Lapp funeral. The audience of the Comédie Française

saw quickly enough that Regnard had this gift and repaid his exercise of it with applause, as an audience always will applaud a clever embodiment of some national trait.

There is no eagerness to point a moral in Regnard's comedies ; indeed he cares not a brass pin about a moral. In his gambling play, Hector (the Gambler) is refused at the last moment by his mistress who marries a rival, while Hector's father flies into a rage, disinherits him, gives him the parental malediction and fumes out of the room. Whereupon Hector merely exclaims : " A nice wedding present ! " The moralising Destouches makes things happen very differently. But that is Regnard—he cannot resist a joke, however inappropriate, and he teems with jokes. In *The Residuary Legatee* he makes Eraste indulge in a series of comic *doubles entendres* about his uncle's property which would have aroused the suspicions of the fondest parent, of the stupidest and most senile uncle. Regnard does not care, he must have his joke and he has it. And apparently the audience did not object, for with the exception of a few spiteful censures from his rivals, this incorrigible joking habit was never deprecated until comparatively recently. But this simply means that we must read Regnard's plays as farces, not as comedies of character. And yet Voltaire said : " The man who does not enjoy Regnard is not worthy to admire Molière."

Lesage's *Turcaret* is more likely to please the generality of modern readers than any of these plays. Although its popularity in France is not great—it has been performed 445 times—it was revived in 1918 with considerable applause. The substitution of intrigue for the eternal five-act dialogue expanded from a " caractère " of La Bruyère is distinctly happy and the first effective departure from the strict Molièresque tradition. It is true M. Turcaret is the centre of the intrigue, and is a type of the eternal profiteer. But there is a very real difference

between a typical character of this kind and one which is simply a vital embodiment of a vice or folly. Moreover all the characters in the play are drawn with the same truth and caustic vigour. They are real people displaying their characters in action, not mere sketches of manners, not embodied traits carefully arranged for satirical and moral purposes. The result is that a modern reader needs to make very little historical adjustment to enjoy *Turcaret*.

We know it was Lesage's admiration for Spanish literature which led him to substitute intrigue for character-study as the pivot of comedy. The realism of his method is due to his own temperament. *Turcaret* interests us then as a predecessor of the triumphant 19th century "vérisme" which Nietzsche thought, and thought rightly, was such a detestable thing. But in *Turcaret* the defects of the method have not become apparent. Lesage was governed by the standard of French classic taste and while his dramatic work is certainly "two-dimensional," it is never vapid or vulgar. In many essentials the play is Molièresque, but it marked a revolt against the tyranny of the narrow acceptation of the Molièresque formula. This was carried in another direction by Marivaux.

If Lesage be a predecessor of the modern realists, Marivaux is certainly a precursor of the vast horde of "psychological" writers. In his lifetime and all through the 18th century he was never really popular, but there was a genuine revival of interest in his plays in the last decades of the 19th century. He is still performed in Paris. Many of his best comedies did not enter the repertory of the Comédie Française until 1802, so that the figures of performances (2,673) are misleading. Yet the recent popularity of his plays is significantly proved by the fact that one of his comedies, *The Game of Love and Chance*, has been performed 778 times between 1802 and 1920. Marivaux the despised, Marivaux for whose

"spider webs" the solid block of *philosophes* could find no phrase too contemptuous, Marivaux is now second only to Molière in popularity. Why is this?

The 18th century disparagement of Marivaux is partly based on ignorance, partly on professional jealousy, but chiefly on a genuine and defensible objection to his style. It is the style of a novelist, not of a dramatist. It is too subtle, too fine-drawn, too allusive, too "psychological" for comedy. We complain that everyone in Regnard's comedies is too witty; similarly everyone in Marivaux's comedies is too refined. The statement in each case is too sweeping, of course; but it is not only Marivaux's aristocratic lovers who analyse to a hair's-breadth their conflicting and complex feelings, the very chambermaids and valets are "metaphysical." Love is the subject of these comedies, but the characters do not make love, they talk about it. The phrase applied to him, "the Racine of comedy," is more epigrammatic than precise. In most respects they are dissimilar; only in choosing love as their main theme do they agree.

The attraction of Marivaux for modern audiences lies precisely in the refinement and psychological subtlety which irritated his contemporaries. Standards of style have so completely altered that no one but the most bewigged censor would upbraid Marivaux for his departure from the French classic form. In fact, this is probably rather a recommendation for him. To the generations who were reading the Goncourts and then M. Bourget, the subtleties of Marivaux presented no difficulties and were even preferable to the plainer and doubtless greater method of Molière. Even now, when Marcel Proust has carried the art of psychology to unheard-of lengths of subtlety, Marivaux still interests, still draws audiences. Lesage may be too plain and matter-of-fact, Regnard too farcical, Destouches too naïve and moralising for the modern intellectuals; but Marivaux they can still enjoy,

perhaps only as a precursor of a kind of art which has been immensely developed since, but still they can enjoy him. To the audience I am thinking of the ordinary realistic play is wearisome; while the theories of Mr. Archer probably strike them as limited and unsound.

With Destouches we reach a period during which French comedy distinctly flags until its triumphant revival by Beaumarchais. Destouches is an able play-maker with a detestable style and an obtrusive moral purpose. His revival of the pure doctrine of Molièresque comedy of character was as much a reaction against the efforts of Marivaux and Lesage to break away from it as his heavy middle class morality was a reaction against the excesses of the Regency. *The Conceited Count* is a better comedy than it sounds when all its faults are enumerated. Its sentiment is depressingly solid, but still it is a relief from mere heartlessness and flippancy. Its "heavy father" is the progenitor of many a stalking melodrama papa, while the innate family affection of Lisette might have flourished in the bosom of a Dickens heroine. Destouches was strongly influenced by English plays, but he admired the wrong things and copied the worst excesses of Addisonian common-sense. His dialogue sins as much from lack of wit, as Regnard's does by excess. It is remarkably flat at times. Nevertheless, to quote Mr. Warton again, he does "exhibit one singular and unfamiliar character, by such a series of incidents as may best contribute to shew its irregularities." We will not stop to enquire whether Count Tufiere is a credible or life-like figure, or whether his brief and sudden repentance for his shocking haughtiness promises an unclouded future for his wife. They would very likely not bear investigation. It is significant that, although *The Conceited Count* was a great success when first produced, it has only 296 performances to its credit and has never been played since 1830. Destouches prepared the way for the lament-

able "tearful comedy" of Nivelle de la Chaussé and the almost equally lamentable "drame bourgeois." It would be very rash to assert that the middle of the century produced no good comedies; there is Voltaire, there is Piron, there is Gresset. But as the comedies grew more and more tearful they grew less and less interesting. A tyranny of false sentiment weighed over the French and English stage, until it was broken by the hearty guffaws of Tony Lumpkin and the inextinguishable merriment of Figaro.

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It is often assumed that English drama was destroyed by the confusion of the Great Rebellion and the Puritan suppression of the theatres. Undoubtedly, these were deplorable events which interrupted the continuity of tradition and postponed for twenty years all chances of dramatic revival. But before the war began English drama was in a state of complete degeneration. How basely the tradition of Shakespeare was interpreted by men like Suckling! Fifty years of intense production had exhausted the vigour of our drama and at this critical moment came the Rebellion. Nearly all the poets were Royalists and were suitably afflicted in consequence. And the drama was cut off from that contact with the nation it had kept all through the great period.

When the theatres re-opened at the Restoration, the native tradition was dead or despised, Molière was triumphantly presenting his early successes, Corneille had written his best plays, and the English court was entirely French in its dramatic tastes. Then began a long period of subjection to the intellectual hegemony of France, especially in the drama. Not even Dryden and Congreve escaped from it, though Dryden visibly fretted under the yoke. All our comic dramatists, Wycherley, Etherege, Dryden, Farquhar, Fielding, Congreve, Goldsmith are dominated by French drama. It is not that one wishes

to play the game of "comparative" critics, and point how Fielding has taken something from Molière; how Shadwell founded *The Sullen Lovers* on *Les Fâcheux* and then sneered at Molière in his preface; how *Le Misanthrope* influenced the writer of *The Plain Dealer*; how Vanburgh's *Aesop* was imitated from Boursault's. The point is that after the Restoration the whole framework of our comedy is French, its method is the method of Molière. There are exceptions, of course, like Shadwell's *Squire of Alsatia* and *Bury Fair*. But in general the writer of comedy was compelled to adopt the French conception of the art under pain of being censured as impolite and barbarous.

Steele initiated a reaction against the sexual freedom of Restoration comedy, not against the French hegemony. While it is possible that *The Funeral* suggested to Regnard the theme of *The Residuary Legatee*, the very titles of Steele's comedies are Molièresque—*The Lying Lover*, *The Conscious Lovers*, *The Tender Husband*. Steele may have thought he was reviving the genuine English comedy just as Destouches thought he was incorporating in the French comedy all the valuable part of English drama. But what worlds apart lie *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and *The Lying Lover*! What, one speculates, did the moral M. Destouches think of *The Roaring Girl* and *Bartholomew Fair*? No good, it may be surmised.

The middle of the 18th century saw English comedy at last overhauling French. And this is due solely to one play, Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*. It was important because it took the lead, which English drama had so long abandoned. It was the first effective protest against the "tearful comedy," which had reigned so long. "The undertaking a comedy, not merely sentimental was very dangerous," says Goldsmith in his dedication to Sam Johnson, "and Mr. Coleman, who saw this piece in its various stages, always thought it so." Whatever its

origins, the prestige of sentimental comedy was derived from Paris.

Yet *She Stoops to Conquer* is not only a rather farcical comedy of the Molière-Regnard type: it has several reminiscences of French plays. The idea of a country house being taken for an inn is derived from a little piece of Dancourt's. Two of the plays given in this book were also laid under contribution. Marivaux's *Game of Love and Chance* supplied the idea of making young Marlowe offer marriage to Miss Hardcastle while he thinks she is a servant. Marlowe and Miss Hardcastle are Marivaux's Sylvia and Dorante in another setting. Again, the amusing but improbable scene where Marlowe meets Miss Hardcastle for the first time and makes a fool of himself because he is too bashful, is a very able re-working of the scene between Philinte and Isabelle in *The Conceited Count*.

I do not cite these parallels for the purpose of depreciating Goldsmith's genius—*She Stoops to Conquer* is one of the best comedy-farces ever written—but merely to show how thoroughly even the greatest writers of English comedy in the 18th century were indebted to French models. The instances could easily be multiplied. No doubt readers who are more widely acquainted with English 18th century drama will at once detect in the four plays printed here points and scenes which have been taken from them by English writers. And if the greatest post-Restoration writers of comedy are so plainly indebted to the French, how much more must it be so with the minor writers who supplied the great mass of plays which please for a month and vanish. If the reader has ever looked at Foote's plays he will see how completely that gentleman bows to the laws of Paris, even while he pretends to make fun of others who do so.

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I cannot tell whether the reader will feel I have alleged sufficient reasons for his spending time over these four

comedies. I have tried to judge them impartially and not to claim more for them than they deserve. At least they will be new to practically all who do not read French and perhaps even to some who do. There are one or two contemporary adaptations in the British Museum and Regnard's *Residuary Legatee* has been translated into American. Otherwise, I believe they have not before appeared in English.

JEAN FRANÇOIS REGNARD

I

Jean François Regnard was a Parisian of Paris, born "sous les piliers des Halles" in the same quarter of Paris as his predecessor and master, Molière. He was baptised on Monday, 8th of February, 1655. His mother was named Marthe Galée, married to Pierre Regnard, a merchant of salt-fish, who made a considerable fortune from the lenten appetites of his fellow townsmen. Jean François was the youngest child and only son of this bourgeois family. His father died before Regnard was three and he was brought up by his mother and elder sisters ; he was carefully educated and, according to some lines in one of his poems, began to write at the age of twelve.

That is all we know of his childhood ; on the other hand so much is known of his later life both from contemporary sources and from his own descriptions of his travels that a fair sized book could easily be made of it. Only an outline can be given here. His life was in some ways as happy, or at least as fortunate, as a human life can be. He had strong appetites and vigorous enthusiasms ; he gratified them and yet escaped the worst consequences, partly by good luck, partly by a prudent Epicureanism. He was a heavy but successful gambler, so successful that he eventually tired of it ; for several years he travelled extensively and met with some remarkable adventures ; he was an amorous, but only once a passionate, man ; he shot and hunted vigorously ; he enjoyed conversation and

society, entertained a good deal, was a judge of good wine and food, liked gardens and horses and possessed good specimens of both. He had not many books—about 150 when he died—but he was well-read for his period. In appearance he was tall and imposing, his face handsome and smiling, his gaze frank and intelligent. His conversation was "easy" and his wit, so conspicuous a feature of his comedies, swift and playful. His gaiety was delightful and attracted to him many acquaintances, who included the duc d'Enghien. Yet he was never merely frivolous; his wit always had salt in it, his pleasures were "regulated by Reason and Philosophy," and the "mitigated cynicism" he put into practice did not render him incapable of serious, even profound thought. He is an engaging embodiment of that old French gaiety which was so sunny and clear, so amiable and intelligent, that gaiety which even in its later degenerate forms has vanished from the world leaving only a wistful memory of its charm.

Regnard was by no means a man of letters, especially in his youth. His early years were spent in travelling, amusement and love-making; he did not make any concerted attack on the stage until after the death of his mother in 1693, presumably from respect for her prejudices against plays. At seventeen he went off on the first of his travels, to Italy, that Italy of the late 17th century described with such enthusiasm and charm by Short-house in "John Inglesant;" but in that land of contrasts, which was still the home of an exquisite and mellow culture, Regnard apparently sought only the Carnival spirit of amusement and cheerful society. He is said to have made a hasty trip from Venice to Constantinople during these two first years in Italy and we are told that he gambled with such success that he paid all his expenses and brought back ten thousand crowns. This sum added to the forty thousand crowns he inherited

from his father made him at his majority a comparatively rich man.

He was in Paris in 1674-75, but in 1676 set off on his travels again with his constant companion M. de Fercourt,¹ a gentleman from Picardy. They spent another two years in Italy, visiting Venice, Bologna, Rome, and Naples. At Venice, Regnard was friendly with the French ambassador; in Rome he frequented the duc d'Estrées, the Chevalier de Mesme and that delightful and cultivated prelate, the abbate di Bentivoglio, to whom Regnard addressed a poetic epistle beginning :

" Favori d'Apollon, toi qui sur le Parnasse,
D'un vol rapide et fier, suis de si pres le Tasse ;
Toi dont les vers galants et libres, dans leurs cours
Semblent être en tout temps dictés par les Amours . . . " ²

At Bologna, Regnard frequented the *salon* of the Marchesa Angelini, and there met a young and charming Frenchwoman, a native of Arles, whose life became curiously involved with his in a series of adventures which are more like " herioc " fiction than real life. This Madame de Prade was by no means insensible to the attraction of her brilliant young countryman, but she had a jealous and watchful husband and she was virtuous ; all of which no doubt made her the more interesting. Regnard and Fercourt separated from M. and Mme. de Prade in Italy with the intention of visiting the Levant. They took passages in an English boat going from Genoa

¹ He left a MS. account of his travels which allows the accuracy of Regnard's sprightly travel pamphlets to be checked.

² " Favourite of Apollo, thou who upon Parnassus with proud, rapid flight followest so close upon Tasso, thou whose verses, gallant and free in their course, seem at all time to have been dictated by the Loves . . . "

to Marseilles, in which by a coincidence, (was it a coincidence ?) the lady and her husband were returning home. Regnard's delight at finding himself in the same boat with Mme. de Prade must have been as intense as her husband's annoyance ; but the idyll rapidly turned to discomfort and tragedy. On the night of the 3rd October, 1678, after the boat had left Genoa, two Algerian corsairs were sighted. It was bright moonlight. No doubt Regnard hoped to utilise the romance of the hour for his amorous purposes, but the moonlight which might have weakened Mme. de Prade's virtue allowed the pirates to keep them in sight. Next day, after a gallant fight, in which Regnard believed he covered himself with glory, the whole party were captured, treated with the indignities the faithful of Allah were wont to inflict upon the infidel, and carried off to Algiers to be sold as slaves.

Here was a pretty ending to a romantic flirtation by moonlight. Regnard, Fercourt and de Prade were bought by a slave-merchant named Achmet Thalem ; Mme. de Prade was bought by another dealer for a harem, but seems to have escaped the worst consequences of the transaction. Regnard was used as a galley-slave ; then his knowledge of cooking promoted him to the kitchen ; he also made bird-cages, while poor Fercourt was employed in carding wool. It is said Regnard was bastinadoed because one of Achmet Thalem's four wives fell violently in love with him ; he was about to be impaled or roasted when luckily his ransom arrived. Father Vacher—one of those admirable and devoted monks who spent their lives in redeeming Christian captives—managed the money so well that he not only purchased Regnard and Fercourt, but their servant and Mme. de Prade. The poor husband seems to have been lost sight of, and Father Vacher in all innocence entrusted Mme. de Prade to Regnard to conduct back to her family in France.

Mme. de Prade believed her husband to be dead, and

during the voyage bewailed his fate as partly due to her own wickedness in not repulsing Regnard. However, that charming young man gradually quieted her scruples and remorse, wiped away her tears and conjured up smiles ; by the time they reached Marseilles—which was in May, 1679—they were on excellent terms. Regnard handed Mme. de Prade over to her family, and after a short rest to enable them to recover from their hardships, he began to urge her to marry him. More tears and regrets and protestations that it was too soon ; but Regnard carried his point and the new marriage was arranged. One day, shortly before it was to take place, Regnard, Mme. de Prade and some friends were talking in her drawing room, when a servant announced that two monks from Algiers wished to speak to her. They were asked in and appeared with a third, ill-dressed and dejected, individual who caused the utmost consternation to the party by throwing himself on Mme. de Prade's neck, thereby revealing the fact that he was the supposedly defunct husband. Regnard's feelings may be imagined as well as those of the lady. The happy return was celebrated by a re-marrying of the de Prades, but Regnard did not wait to witness the ceremony. He did the only thing a man could do under the circumstances ; he left. He was never so near marriage again.

Even these adventures with their serio-comic ending—so like an old French comedy—did not quench Regnard's love of travelling. It is true that henceforth he avoided the shores of the Mediterranean, which had proved so disastrous to his liberty and his affections ; but in the spring of 1681, he and Fercourt set off on an expedition to Holland. They pushed on to Denmark and Sweden, the Kings of which countries received Regnard and became very friendly with him. The King of Sweden suggested a trip to Lapland and Regnard spent two months in that country, leaving a Latin inscription on a rock to mark

his "farthest north" and afterwards writing a very sprightly account of his experiences. He returned to France by way of Poland (where he met John Sobiewski), Hungary, Austria, and Germany ; reaching Paris in 1682. This year closes the wandering period of Regnard's life, except for excursions in France. He was twenty-six and began to desire some more settled way of life ; he has described this spiritual crisis in the *Reflexions* attached to his *Voyages*. After relating how bad weather detained him at an island in the Baltic and describing his solitary meditations among the rocks, he proceeds :

" I first cast a glance over the agitations of my past life, the plans without execution, the resolutions without results, the enterprises without success. I considered the state of my present life, the wandering travels, the changing from place to place, the diversity of objects and the continual movements by which I was agitated. I recognised myself wholly in both these states, where inconstancy had a greater share than anything else, without vanity coming to flatter the least feature to prevent my recognising myself in the picture. I judged everything sanely, I realised that all this was directly opposed to the society [*happiness*] of life, which consists uniquely in repose ; and that this happy tranquillity of mind is found in some congenial profession, which holds us as an anchor holds a vessel in the midst of a storm."

In pursuance of this sage resolution Regnard bought the post of "trésorier de France au bureau des Finances de Paris," described vaguely by his biographers as a "kind of magistracy with ample leisure." It provided Regnard with a knowledge of financial operations which did not further mitigate his cynicism, but he did not possess that kind of *naïveté* which believes that all men are naturally good and grows indignant upon discovering proofs to the contrary. He always laughed at life ; and he is as remote from the bitterness of Lesage as from the

sentimentality of Destouches. He was an excellent collaborator for Dufresny, who was another of these merry fellows, calling himself "the King's Amuser." This purchase was carried through in 1683, and Regnard appears to have lived with his mother until her death in 1693, when he inherited more money. During these years he gradually abandoned the more fugitive forms of writing—epigrams, madrigals, songs, most of which are lost—and began to turn towards the stage. Like many writers he first attempted something completely unsuitable to his talents; he wrote a tragedy called "Sapor," which was accepted by the Théâtre Français but never produced. He then turned to the less exacting Italian Comedians and his first farce was played by them on the 17th March, 1688. He then began to write regularly for them, often in collaboration with Dufresny, and in January, 1690, scored a great success with his *Arlequin ou l'Homme à Bonnes Fortunes*. The success was so considerable that the "regular" critics became alarmed and wrote solemn pamphlets showing that the play was contrary to all the rules and was therefore bad. Regnard, who, like Molière before him, had a healthy conviction that the public was the best judge of works whose purpose was to make the public laugh, made fun of his detractors in a *Critique d'Arlequin* produced in the following year.

The year of 1694 was an important one in Regnard's literary career. His mother had recently died, thereby leaving him perfectly free to follow his dramatic inclinations; he placed a one-act comedy, *Attendez-moi sous L'Orme*, with the Théâtre Français; and he engaged in a literary skirmish with Boileau, in which Regnard showed the old man that he was not the only satirist living in France. Boileau published a satire against women; Regnard, "toujours galant," rushed in with a counterblast against husbands; Boileau sneered at Regnard in an *Epistle*; Regnard retorted with a slashing

Tombeau de M. Boileau-Despréaux, ending with the epitaph :

“ Ci-gît Maître Boileau, qui vécut de médire,
 Et qui mourut aussi par un trait de satire :
 Le coup dont il frappa lui fut enfin rendu.
 Si par malheur un jour son livre était perdu,
 A le chercher bien loin, passant, ne t'embarrasse :
 Tu le retrouveras tout entier dans Horace.” ¹

The sting in the tail must have been the more galling, in that it was largely true. However, they were eventually reconciled.

In 1693 Regnard had taken a house in the Rue de Richelieu, from which he had a fine view of Montmartre and its thirty windmills, only two of which now remain, and they are used for purposes somewhat different from those originally intended. He even grew a pleasant little vintage in his garden, with which he entertained the numerous guests attracted by his charm and wit and growing literary reputation. At this house he lived in unobtrusive gaiety and comfort, deserving his nickname of the “new Democritus” in a manner very dissimilar to “Democritus Junior” of melancholy fame. Just before Christmas 1696, his first great comedy *Le Joueur* was produced by the Comédie Française,² followed a year later by *Le Distrait*. The success of *Le Joueur* made Dufresny very jealous of his collaborator and he asserted that Regnard had stolen the subject from him. Both were heavy gamblers, but when Dufresny later put on the

¹ “ Here lies Master Boileau, whose living was scandal and who died also from a shaft of satire ; the blow he struck was at last returned him. If by mischance his book were ever lost, O passer-by, do not trouble to seek it far—you will find it all in Horace.”

² The Italians were suppressed in 1697 (for a satire on Mme. de Maintenant) and re-established in 1716 by the Regent, duc d'Orléans.

stage his *Gambler*, it was not hard to see that Regnard was the real dramatic genius. Henceforth, until his death, Regnard continued to supply the Comédie Française with comedies in a crescendo of success. The receipts for the first night reached sums hitherto unheard of ; *Le Joueur* brought 1386 livres, 36 sols ; *Le Distrain* (1697) 1681 livres, 15 sols ; " *Démocrite* " (1700) 1778 livres, 6 sols ; *Folies Amoureux* (1704) 1833 livres, 12 sols ; *Les Ménechmes* (1705) 1807 livres, 16 sols ; and *Le Légataire Universel* (1708) brought 2246 livres, 10 sols.

Regnard resigned his Treasury post¹ and in 1699 bought the Chateau de Grillon, near Dourdan, about eleven leagues from Paris. In one of the rooms he hung up the chains he had worn as a slave ; and he occupied his days with writing, gardening, hunting and shooting, and entertaining different parties of guests. Various ladies received Regnard's "homages" at various times ; history has preserved the name of the younger Mlle. Loyson, known more familiarly as "La Tontine." She was very accomplished and charming, but had a mercenary Mamma who married her to an old rich gentleman with the significant and predestined name of Cornu de la Boissière. She appears to have made Regnard as unhappy as his buoyant temperament would permit ; but the ten years of Regnard's life at Grillon, so delightfully described by M. Guyot, were cheerful enough, except that he began to grow fat and suffered from pimples, "a misfortune which deeply afflicted one who had been so handsome in his youth." He died at the comparatively early age of 54, on the 4th September, 1709. A certain mystery surrounds his death. Only his servants were present and it was very sudden. Some hinted poison ; Voltaire suggests suicide, no one knows why ; others invented an absurd story of Regnard's having taken a horse drench to see if it would work with a human being ; most probable is the report that he drank

¹ One biographer says he "retained it twenty years."

a quantity of ice water when over heated with hunting. He was buried hugger-mugger the next day, for, as in his own *Residuary Legatee*, his heirs were more interested in his property than in him. His body was interred near the altar of Saint-Germain at Dourdan, but its monument was broken up at the Revolution.

In 1853 Regnard's charming Chateau de Grillon was destroyed by a syndicate of "commerçants"—the revenge of finance.¹ About the same time repairs were being made to the Church at Saint-Germain and just as the workmen were finishing one evening they uncovered the skeleton of a man. Some young hooligans amused themselves by pulling out and brandishing the tibias; the youngest were terrified at the skull which had long thick hair still attached to it. One of the older boys caught it up by the hair and ran after them dragging the skull behind him; as the skull bumped from step to step outside the church door it dropped into pieces which fell among the builder's rubbish.

It was Regnard.

II

THE RESIDUARY LEGATEE

This comedy-farce kept a hold upon the stage as long as the tradition of Molière retained its popularity. It has been admired, perhaps excessively, by all "classical" French critics, disparaged by the French followers of Ibsen as extravagantly as their English equivalents disparaged the Elizabethans. The main point to remember in reading Regnard is that he aimed at creating laughter without much concern for probability. His main

¹ "Gagne-t-on en cinq ans un million sans crime?" (*Le Distrain*) ["Who makes a million in five years without crime?"]

theme is preserved the whole way through indeed, but he will introduce irrelevance at any moment for the sake of a jest ; thus, he gives Crispin a former wife and three years career as a lawyer's clerk, merely to work in a joke which probably occurred to him in writing the scene and has nothing whatever to do with the main plot, reveals no characteristic, no trait of manners. It made the pit laugh and that was the writer's object. This comedy-farce of Regnard's is less amusing than Molière's *Malade Imaginaire* from which it is obviously derived, and inferior in satirical power and character study to any of the great Molière comedies of character—*Le Misanthrope*, *L'Avare*, *Tartuffe*.

Regnard's genius shows itself in form and style. He is admirable for the skill with which he forces his central stem of plot to develop into one laughable incident after another in a perpetual alternation of hope and disappointment, advancing and delaying the inevitable happy ending, until even his sources of laughter are dried up. The satire is unobtrusive ; there is no sentimentality, no "social thesis," no dull preaching. Gaiety is the author's mood and a profusion of wit his characteristic. The unblushing scramble for the money of an old man on the edge of the grave has been gravely censured by moralists, and the slightly *macabre* flavour of the plot objected to as contrary to mirth ; but contrasted with the heavy sentimentalities and conventional triumphs of virtue in Steele's *The Funeral* (which moves about a rather similar incident) Regnard's play is a masterpiece of amusement. The architecture of Regnard's *Legatee* is superior to any English play of the period ; look, for example, at the miserable last act of *The Beaux Stratagem* (1707). This constructive ability of course remains in the translation ; I wish I could say the same of the wit, but much of that is inevitably lost.

The theme of the play was at one time thought to be

fact and gave rise to one of the innumerable calumnies against the Jesuits. The tale was that an old French gentleman, named Gauthiot d'Ancier had been lured to Rome by the Jesuits who coveted his property. He died intestate and the Fathers were supposed to have brought to Rome an old peasant whose voice resembled d'Ancier's and to have made him play the part which Crispin plays in *The Residuary Legatee*. It was asserted that the peasant confessed the whole matter on his death-bed and that this caused a great law-suit. In 1779 the whole story was solemnly repeated by one Falbaire in a book against the Jesuits ; it was not properly refuted until 1869 and probably is still believed by anti-Jesuit fanatics. The story is really taken from the *Sonnette ed altre rime con alcune Novelle* of Marco Cadamosto di Lodi, an "ecclesiastic who lived in Rome during the Pontificates of Leo X. and Clement VII."

To take the play act by act. In Act I the most amusing scene is that where Geronte is leading up to the declaration of his own proposed marriage with Isabelle, while Eraste, misinformed beforehand by Lisette, thinks he is to be the husband. Eraste's consternation when he finds the mistake is more amusing even than the *doubles entendres* of his assumed compliance with his uncle's wish. The scene with Madam Argante and Isabelle is less amusing, except for Lisette's remarks to Geronte and its unexpected and unromantic *denoûment*. Crispin's jokes, Lisette's "immodesty," and Geronte's speech to Isabelle : " You are, as it were, a future julep for my heart, etc.," have all been censured as extravagant.

Act II opens with one of the gravest defects in the play. Madam Argante has been shown as a very " practical " woman ; one of those so " practical " mothers who under the pretence of making their daughters happy would marry them to the devil if he had enough money to gild the match. Now, it is quite unlikely that this money-

grabbing harpy would break off the match with Geronte *before* the nephew had secured his uncle's property, merely on his word that he would get it. From the first reviewer in the "Mercure" in 1708 down to the present, all commentators are agreed about the defectiveness of this scene. It is so very improbable and yet so necessary to the evolution of the play. The remarks of Geronte about the money to be left to the relatives in Normandy and the subsequent scene between Lisette and Crispin are necessary to lead up to Crispin's "*fourberies*," but the scene with M. Clistorel, the apothecary, is not only an inferior copy of the scene with M. Purgon in *La Malade Imaginaire*, it has the defect of showing no adequate cause for M. Clistorel's anger. Moreover, he interrupts his rage in order that Regnard may enjoy his joke about the apothecaries' functions. This is the weakest act of the play.

Act III. contains Crispin's amusing impersonations of the country relatives, in order to provoke Geronte against them by his outrageous conduct. From a realistic point of view, the whole thing is wildly improbable; but it must always be remembered that this is a comedy-farce and that the conventions of the *genre* permit great license in disguises. The scenes bustle very amusingly and convincingly, once we are reconciled to Geronte's being deceived; and we are told that he has never seen these relatives, knows little of Crispin, and is in his dotage. The supposed death of Geronte at the end of the Act comes to interrupt the conspirators' rejoicing very smartly.

In Act IV is "Crispin's masterpiece," his unlimited effrontery (in spite of a few apprehensions) in counterfeiting the personage of Geronte before the notaries. The fun of this scene is excellent; Crispin's mingled apprehension and impudence, the unconscious notaries, the uneasy excitement of the others, and then Crispin's putting into the will his own debt to the wine-shop and

large legacies to himself and Lisette—all is excellent farce. It may be mere fancy but I think the dialogue between Crispin and Eraste in this Act is meant as a parody of the "agitated chorus" in Euripidean tragedy; which of course would have been more readily perceived and enjoyed two centuries ago than now. Then the revival of Geronte from his "trance," throwing them all into fresh perplexities, is very amusing. There is another defect in Eraste's taking the pocket-book of notes to Isabelle. Why? Of course the author needs them to be in her hands in the last act; but there seems no sense in taking them to her. Moreover, the "unity of place" causes a further anomaly, because at the beginning of Act V Madam Argante and Isabelle have to be in Geronte's house and yet Eraste has just expressly said he is going to them.

Apart from this weakness Act V rounds the comedy off skilfully. The apprehensions of the conspirators when the notary comes back with the will, Geronte's amazement when he hears it read, the lucky phrase about his "trance" which gives the trio their clue when they are at their wits' ends; are all first rate fun. The repetition of "It is your trance" is of course a regular device of French comedy. The "happy ending" is a foregone conclusion.

The play, taken as a whole, ought to amuse the English reader, provided he will accept the limitations of the French comedy-farce and not grumble that the play fails to be something Regnard never tried to make it. The true basis for comparison is the Restoration comedy of wit, not the Elizabethan romantic comedy or the modern drama of realism.

In 1769, T. King published *Wit's Last State: a farce* founded on *Le Légataire Universel*.

THE RESIDUARY LEGATEE

Comedy in Five Acts

BY JEAN^e FRANÇOIS REGNARD

Played for the first time on
Monday, the 9th January, 1708

PERSONS

GERONTE	Eraste's uncle
ERASTE	Isabelle's lover
MADAM ARGANTE	Isabelle's mother
ISABELLE	daughter of Madam Argante
LISETTE	Geronte's servant
CRISPIN	Eraste's Valet
M. CLISTOREL	an apothecary
M. SCRUPLE	} notaries
M. GASPARD	
A LACKEY	

Scene : At Paris. In Geronte's house

THE RESIDUARY LEGATEE

ACT I

(Lisette and Crispin)

LISETTE: Good-morning, Crispin, good-morning !

CRISPIN: Good-morning, fair Lisette ! My master is continually filled with a troublesome anxiety, and sends me (his zealous collateral) to enquire of you, as soon as you are up, how his uncle has passed the night.

LISETTE: Badly.

CRISPIN: The old man is weighed with years and infirmities ; he long struggles against the fates and parries the fatal shaft of death—in vain, for he will not escape the doctor's. He¹ holds the last ; and this sickly body is marked down as a victim to his fatal art. We foresee that very soon, with a heavy or slight mourning, Geronte will be laid full length in his coffin. If my master could be made legatee I would gladly pay the expenses of the candles.

LISETTE: I have just given him a remedy ordered by the apothecary. I thought it would be the last in his life ; twice he fell against me in a trance.

CRISPIN: You look after the soups for his mouth and the clysters for his posteriors ?

LISETTE: He thinks they are better from my hand ; and indeed, not to plume myself on a vain science, I understand the business better than any girl in France.

¹ i.e. The Doctor.

CRISPIN : Peste ! A fine talent ! And I suppose you see you are well paid for all the trouble you take with your master ?

LISETTE : He gives me nothing ; but as a reward I have the right to speak to him with great freedom. I say insulting things under his very nose, and that is all the profit I have made in five years. He is the stingiest miser ever seen in this life ; I cannot tell you the extent of his meanness. Every day he finds some wonderful new stroke of avarice in his fertile brain. He has chosen for his doctor an apothecary of summary stature, no higher than my leg : he thinks the smaller the man is, the less money he will want and that he will not cost so much because he is short.

CRISPIN : Well, perhaps he is short, but he will have very long accounts.

LISETTE : But the favours distributed in his will ought to make up to me for his miserliness ; and so I am careful to keep up my enthusiasm.

CRISPIN : He is making his will ?

LISETTE : I hope very soon to see my name set down in rich letters.

CRISPIN : A very good hope too ; and I hope to see mine set down there also in letters of gold.

LISETTE : Gently, friend, gently. To hear you one would think you had a claim to the inheritance too. Are there not enough competitors already, without your placing yourself in their ranks ? The good seigneur Geronte has many heirs, so many that I am sometimes ashamed of them : Uncles, nephews, nieces, cousins, half-cousins mixed up with first-cousins ; the other day I counted seven hundred living males on the paternal side ; imagine the females !

CRISPIN : Yes, but my master aspires to the largest share and I might easily manage to snatch my quota ; I am slightly related, I am connected with the family.

LISETTE: You?

CRISPIN: My first wife was rather pretty, a brisk Bretonne, and a coquette; Eraste, whom I serve, found her very much to his taste: and since he was always beloved by the ladies I think we may very well be related on the female side, and thereby I am as good as grand-nephew to monsieur Geronte.

LISETTE: Ah, yes; you may pass as a country relative or as a nephew, Breton fashion.¹

CRISPIN: But, joking apart, it is most necessary for us that Geronte should be careful to make his will. If my master is not made legatee *primo*, he will spend the rest of his days on meagre cheer. *Secundo*, although he is devilish amorous, before Madam Argante crowns his passion and marries him to her daughter Isabelle, she wants the said nephew to be made inheritor of the whole by a good will, well and truly made. But to our taste the best of it is that Eraste will give us an annuity of three hundred *livres* if we succeed as he desires; this gift will form the bond of our marriage, and therefore all these reasons are so many means which I use to prove that it is very necessary the above-mentioned nephew should be named legatee; and I conclude that we must act in concert to obtain the above-named will.

LISETTE: The deuce! Crispin, you plead like an angel.

CRISPIN: So I believe. Does my talent appear so odd to you? In my studies I shone rather honourably and for three years I was clerk to an attorney. His wife was pretty; and in certain matters we judged little cases² in camera.

LISETTE: A good place—why did you leave it?

CRISPIN: The husband was a little jealous and made me desert it. A solicitor is not a very amenable man; he

¹ " Breton fashion "—" once removed." ² " Commissaires,"

practised the devil's own chicanery on me about his wife. Faith, I fought for two years before I left, but at last I was constrained to decamp.

(Enter Eraste)

CRISPIN : But here's my master.

ERASTE : Ah ! there you are, Lisette ! Relieve me, if you can, of the uneasiness which troubles me. Is my uncle in a state to be seen ?

LISETTE : Ah ! sir, he is even feebler than yesterday ; I thought this night would be his last and that I should close his eyelids forever. The letters of reprieve he takes out against death will be of no service to him, or I am greatly mistaken.

ERASTE : Heavens ! What have you said ?

CRISPIN : It is the pure truth.

ERASTE : Whatever my hopes may be, I find nature calls up sad feelings in my heart.

CRISPIN : I felt the same motions myself once, when my wife passed the banks of Cocytus to take boat and visit the dead. In my heart I felt a pleasure filled with charms, as so many husbands would in a similar position : and yet nature, awakening grief, made some opposition to joy, and through certain confused mixtures and motives they fought and gained the upper hand by turns ; so that hope . . . natural grief. . . love. . . It is all easier felt than explained ; but what I can say, and speak the truth, is that I was both sad and happy at the same time.

ERASTE : I feel a sincere affection for my uncle ; I yield to him in everything to please him ; whatever he says or does, whether he is right or wrong, I agree with him that he is right.

LISETTE : The old man must be uneasy about his affairs since he told me to send for two notaries.

CRISPIN : Two notaries, alas ! That kills my heart !

LISETTE : It is to draw the deeds with more ceremony.

ERASTE : Tell me, child, in confidence, can I, without flattering myself, entertain some hope ?

LISETTE : Your hope is very well groundèd : for some days he has held conferences with Madam Argante and they whisper about legacies and marriage : I have learned nothing more of their plans. Your mistress entered into the conversation as well. For my part, I think he wants to leave you all his money, and to make you marry Isabelle.

ERASTE : Ah ! Lisette, how you flatter my senses ! How perfect my joy is ! I am not moved by interest to-day ; a stranger and more powerful god, Love, speaks in my heart : the charming Isabelle is a fairer excuse for all my desires and makes me hope for the will. . .

LISETTE : Love and interest shall both be satisfied : is it just that so fair an inheritance should become the portion of a hundred foolish co-heirs ? Shall I behold with dry eyes so many rustics, noddies and boobies tearing into shreds an inheritance which, by the way, ought some day to render you happy and make us comfortable ? For you know, sir. . .

ERASTE : Be easy about it ; what I have said is said ; rely upon me.

LISETTE : If your uncle does for you what he proposes to do, I can say, without boasting too much of my pains, that I am in part the cause ; I tell him every day that there was never a nephew more gentle, more compliant, more respectful, not from the hope of any gain you might expect but from a tender and delicate nature.

CRISPIN : How well she knows your heart ! Faith, you cannot overpay her devotion. In a little time I am to be contracted to her. Look at her, sir ; she is young and beautiful ; but don't make the use of her you did of the other, ah, no !

LISETTE : Monsieur Geronte is coming ; you must

change your tone. I have not had time to go for the notaries. You, who talked to me so long about your own affairs, go quickly, run, tell them to be ready when needed. One is named Gaspard and lives at this corner, the other a little lower down ; his name is Scruple.

CRISPIN : A ridiculous name for a notary.

(Crispin goes. Enter Geronte and a lackey)

GERONTE : Ah, good-morning, nephew.

ERASTE : I am indeed charmed to see you again in better health ; pray sit down.

(The lackey brings a chair)

Take that chair away ; my uncle will be more comfortable in this armchair.

(The lackey goes)

GERONTE : Last night I was well shaken up and I went through a dangerous attack ; another like it would certainly capture the fort.

ERASTE : But you are much better now and by the grace of Heaven we may hope for your imperilled days. We must immediately think of how to repair the disorders caused by your illness, and after this prescribe a regime of life for you, make you take good broths, sure cordials, clean your stomach with good purges ; in short, let you want for nothing.

GERONTE : Yes, I should greatly like what you propose, but it costs so much money to be well attended that the money might as well be saved, since we all have to die. These syringe-carriers put on such arrogant airs ! . . . Their drugs are only to be bought for their weight in gold ; he who can do without them and die suddenly will doubtless make a large saving in his life-time.

ERASTE: Yes, you are right, it is a tyranny; but I will bear the expenses of your illness. Health in this world is the most important of all goods and a man of sense should spare nothing for it. No doubt you will get over your neglected illness. Let us try to repair your strength, whatever it costs.

GERONTE: It is money wasted in this case; the house is not worth the repairs. My dear nephew, I want to put my affairs in order.

Did you give the order to go for two notaries?

LISETTE: Yes, sir, and you will soon see them here.

GERONTE: And soon you will know my intentions as well; I want to tell you about them, as a relative should.

ERASTE: I can guess very easily what they are.

GERONTE: I have collaterals. . .

LISETTE: Yes, indeed, and a good many of them.

GERONTE: Who, with greedy looks and wolfish teeth devour by anticipation in the recesses of their hearts an inheritance which is their one hope.

ERASTE: Don't confound me with such relatives, uncle if you please.

GERONTE: I know all about that.

ERASTE: Your health concerns me and gives me more pleasure than all the gold which might fall to my share.

GERONTE: I am convinced of it. I want to avenge myself on a vain mass of heirs and to madden them, to chose an honest person who pleases me and whom I can bequeath my money to and leave in comfort.

ERASTE: You must follow your own wishes in the matter.

LISETTE: Well, I can't imagine a more delightful pleasure than to see an afflicted crowd of heirs with long faces and abashed expressions, to read them a will by which they, pale and astonished, are left a good-night with a long nose. To see their profound grief to the life I think I would come back on purpose from the other world.

GERONTE : Although I am already stricken and, from the ills I feel, reminded that I have lived long ; although a burning gravel causes me nephritis and I endure the pangs of a sharp sciatica which, in spite of the stick I carry everywhere, sometimes makes me dissimulate a little in my gait ; yet I am more vigorous than they suppose and I see many people deceived by my appearance.

LISETTE : There are some of your shaving days when, faith ! you appear no more ill than I do.

GERONTE : Is that true ?

LISETTE : A sort of glitter shines in your eye.

GERONTE : I always thought there was good in that girl. But I must think of putting my affairs in order, before the means are taken from me by a sudden demise. You know and sometimes see Madam Argante ?

ERASTE : Yes ; she is most charming in her manner.

GERONTE : And her daughter Isabelle—euh !—do you know her ?

ERASTE : Very well ; she is a modest girl who charms at first sight.

GERONTE : You admit that Heaven has poured into her soul the qualities one would look for in a wife ?

ERASTE : I do not know a more worthy object of anyone's vows nor a girl more apt to make a man happy.

GERONTE : I am going to marry her.

ERASTE : You, uncle !

GERONTE : Myself.

ERASTE : I confess it gives me an extreme—pleasure.

LISETTE : Mercy ! Alas ! Ah ! Heaven help us ! Who is the unfortunate woman you are going to marry ?

GERONTE : Isabelle, to-day ; and this marriage will give her all my property after my death.

ERASTE : You could not do better and I am very glad of it. I wish that I could do as much.

LISETTE : What ! you old, broken-down, feverish, epileptic, paralytic, consumptive, asthmatic, dropsical

creature, will you light the torch of Hymen and make but one step from the wedding to the grave?

GERONTE: I know what I need; I beg you to realise that even my health demands that I marry. I take a wife from whom I shall receive every day great help in my infirmity. How does it assist me to have a greedy cohort of heirs, who, as they fumble for the keys of my strong-box, will perhaps let down my bed before I am dead? A wife, on the contrary, faithful to her duty, will show her zeal by her conjugal care; and, while I gather all the fruit of her chaste love, I shall see myself die quietly in peace.

ERASTE: My uncle speaks justly, and could not do better than to secure for himself this needful help. An economical and reasonable woman alone can take care of the whole house.

GERONTE: (*embracing him*): Ah! good boy! Could I have expected that he would take this affair as I see he takes it?

ERASTE: Your good alone is precious to me.¹

GERONTE: Ah, well, you shall lose nothing by it: whatever happens I shall help you, and you will not be disappointed in your expectations.

But somebody is coming.

(*Enter a lackey*)

LACKEY: Sir, Madam Argante and her daughter are here.

ERASTE: I will bring them up.

(*He goes*)

GERONTE (*to Lisette*): My hat, my wig.

¹ And, "Your goods alone are precious to me." ("Votre bien seul m'est précieux.")

LISETTE : I was bringing them. Here they are.

GERONTE : Let me beg you not to speak to them of my clyster or of my trance.

LISETTE : They both have sharp noses ; in a moment they will certainly smell it anyhow.

(Enter Madam Argante, Isabelle and Eraste)

MME ARGANTE : This morning we heard news of you which put us into mortal pain on your behalf. It is said you passed the night very badly.

GERONTE : It is a rumour circulated by my heirs ; I have never been in better health, I swear to you.

ERASTE : My uncle has the face of a gallant of thirty, or very nearly so.

LISETTE *(aside)* : Yes, who will soon die.

GERONTE : I should be very ill and more than at the last agony if such lovely eyes could not bring me back to life.

MME ARGANTE : Daughter, at this moment you see before you the man I have selected as your husband.

GERONTE : Yes, madam, it is you (at least so I flatter myself) who will relieve my infirmities better than another Hippocrates. You are, as it were, a future julep for my heart to clean it of everything impure ; my marriage with you is a sure emetic and, in fine, I take you as my last poultice.

ISABELLE : Sir, I do not know what you take me for, but this choice confuses me and you surprise me.

MME ARGANTE : By marrying you, he secures you advantages which ought to make you forget both his age and his infirmities ; and you will have no reason to repent of it.

ISABELLE : Madam, duty will force me to consent ; but perhaps this severe authority will not give Monsieur Geronte what he hopes to find in me. I know what I am

and how little I am worthy to be (as he puts it), a remedy to his infirmities ; but he is deceived if he hopes by my appearance to find a whole pharmacopœia in me. I know my eyes ; they will never work so wonderful a cure and such extraordinary results.

ERASTE : I render more justice to the power of those eyes.

GERONTE : If love be propitious, I judge, from the fire I feel, that without signalizing myself over much, my heirs will find some small opposition before nine months have passed ; very soon there will be news of me in the world.

LISETTE (*aside*) : Ah ! Faith ! he'll make wonderful news ! (*aloud*) : If the devil tempts you and you must marry, let him seek out another object to match with you. I appeal to you ; Madam is brisk and lovely ; she should have a husband as brisk as she is, well-made, handsome, not more than twenty-five : you reached your majority long, long ago. Are marriages to be spoken of at your age ? Make use of the notary to better purpose. A good will, morbleu ! a will, strongly made and well cemented, in your case ought to take the place of affection, love, desire, home, wife, marriage settlements, children and wedding. I have spoken and am silent.

GERONTE : Indeed you do well ; and what has so sharpened your prattle ?

LISETTE : Reason.

GERONTE (*to Madam Argante and Isabelle*) : Don't be offended by her airs ; sometimes she speaks her mind freely to me ; I allow it because she has a few good points.

LISETTE : I am unable to flatter anyone.

ERASTE : You are very wrong to speak in that way ; I wish I were in your master's place. He wants to be married and is he not right to have an heir (if he can) of

11 "Auront a qui parler"—"will have someone to talk to them"
—meaning, of course, the heir he hopes to beget,

his own making? What! shall he refuse an amiable person whom his happy destiny reserves for him and gives him? Ah! Heaven be my witness if ever I desired a more glorious fate to gratify my own wishes!

ISABELLE: Then you advise me to conclude the affair?

ERASTE: I think you cannot do better.

ISABELLE: Since you so desire, sir, your loving counsels and your rare advice shall be followed.

MME ARGANTE: My daughter always knows how to obey when I command.

ERASTE: Yes, I maintain that a young woman, in spite of her repugnance and the pride of her senses, ought blindly to follow her parents' choice; and, after all, my uncle is not so old yet that he must give up all thoughts of marriage; are sixty-eight years so great a decline for. . .

GERONTE: I shall only be that next midsummer.

LISETTE: He has endured the shock of two apoplexies, which turned out to be only paralyses, fortunately; all the doctors who know his disorders swear by Galen that when he returns from taking the waters he will have neither sciatica, gout, gravel, stitch, cough nor nephritis.

GERONTE: They assure me that in a little time I might have several children of my own.

LISETTE: I am no more a doctor than I am an apothecary and yet I would swear to the contrary.

GERONTE (*whispers to Lisette*): Lisette, the remedy begins to work in a certain place. . .

LISETTE: If you burst with it, don't give any sign.

ERASTE: What is it, uncle? You change countenance.

GERONTE: Nephew, I can hold out no longer. Ah! Ah! . . . Madam, I must say farewell. A certain pressing duty calls me to a certain place.

MME ARGANTE: We will leave you, for fear of being troublesome.

GERONTE: Eraste, see them down. Excuse me, I beg,

I can stay with you no longer. (*Goes with his lackey*)

LISETTE (*to Isabelle*): Madam, you see the power of your glances: one look from you (of an easy motion) moves more humours, agitates more bile, works more in him the very first time than all the medicines he has taken in six months. Oh, the power of love!

MME ARGANTE: Farewell, I must go.

ERASTE: Madam, permit me the honour of accompanying you.

(*All go but Lisette*)

LISETTE (*alone*): And I must go in and look to my work; the old man is waiting and he can do nothing without me. For the beginning of an arranged marriage I must confess this was a pretty interview!

END OF ACT I

ACT II

(*Madam Argante, Isabelle, Eraste*)

MME ARGANTE : You detain us too long ; allow us to go.

ERASTE : I cannot leave nor let you go until you flatter me with a ray of hope.

MME ARGANTE : I wish I could give you the preference.

ERASTE : What ! Madam, will you be so cruel as to conclude this marriage before my eyes after you promised the charming Isabelle to me ? Can I see myself separated from her and still live ?

MME ARGANTE : When I promised her to you, you made me an oath that in favour of this engagement your uncle would possess you with all his property by a deed of gift ; he offers to do this to my daughter if she marries him. Am I wrong ?

ERASTE (*to Isabelle*) : And will you consent to this, Madam ?

ISABELLE : Assuredly, sir, he will be my husband. And did not you yourself say to me just now that, in spite of her repugnance at taking the person offered her, a daughter ought to follow the will of her parents ?

ERASTE : And do you not see that this was a mere artifice to flatter his caprice, with the intention of disappointing his schemes ? Some minds must be taken obliquely, if you attack them from the front, you never

obtain anything. My uncle is made in that way. (*To Madam Argante*) And can interest bring you to sacrifice so dear a daughter?

MME ARGANTE: But the service he renders her. . .

ERASTE: Give me your word you will break off this marriage, and I promise you to turn his mind to-day so that things will go as I hope and that he will make a will in my favour.

MME ARGANTE: If he does that, my daughter is yours, absolutely. I will write him a note and say his age and frail health are unsuitable to marriage, that I should be the cause of his death, that the affair is broken off and he is to think no more about it.

ISABELLE: It gives me infinite joy to obey.

ERASTE: How happy my lot is! How much to be envied! But here comes Lisette and I hear a noise.

(*Enter Lisette*)

ERASTE (*to Lisette*): How is my uncle?

LISETTE: He is coming behind me.

MME ARGANTE (*to Eraste*): I leave you with him; I must go. But before going, I will write to him downstairs. On your side you must support my zeal.

ERASTE: The prize I hope from it will answer for my heart.

(*Madam Argante and Isabelle go out*)

LISETTE: Well, are you going to allow your uncle at his age to make such a silly marriage under your very eyes? Will you let him deprive you of the property you ought to have?

ERASTE: Alas, my dear child, I am in despair. But the business is not yet completed and his fire may go off in smoke. The mother has changed her mind in my favour and has arranged with me to write a note refusing my

uncle and making him understand he is a little too elderly to be her son-in-law.

LISETTE : I will enter the plot too. But what becomes of the will on which we founded all our hopes and by which our marriages were one day to be secured and so make the happiness of Eraste and Crispin ? We must create our own destiny by our own wits and absolutely prevent this marriage. I have sent a message about it to his apothecary who is coming here soon ; he is a headstrong little man who will abuse him roundly for it. I am unwilling to remain passive ; that is a fool's part. But here comes Geronte.

(Enter Geronte and Lackey)

GERONTE : My colic took me at an unlucky moment : I never felt so many pains at once. But were they not irritated by my leaving them so abruptly ?

ERASTE : They know that everything must be excused in a sick man.

LISETTE : He did the honours for you until the end. Yet I must say that in doing your business you didn't make a very splendid preliminary.

ERASTE : My uncle will do better a second time ; it is sufficient that he has chosen well in marrying.

GERONTE : It is true. And yet at my age I feel some repugnance at the thought of being married ; but since I have promised. . .

LISETTE : Don't force yourself ; people are not scrupulous on this point. Monsieur Eraste will redeem your word.

GERONTE : The lot is drawn, I must follow my destiny. I should like to imagine some little present which would be original—but not cost much money.

ERASTE : Let me take the responsibility for the entertainment, for the clothes and the dinner which must be got ready ; I can prescribe in such matters better than a doctor,

GERONTE : Do not embark me on a great banquet.

LISETTE : Abundance, carefully dispensed, must make up to us for your dismal appearance ; we must hear the violins hum too, and I will dance the cotillion with you.

GERONTE : Ah, in my time I was worth my price as well as another.

LISETTE (*aside*) : Which makes you worth so little in ours.

(*Enter Madam Argante's Lackey*)

MME ARGANTE'S LACKEY : My mistress, who has just gone, told me to give you this note.

GERONTE (*taking the note*) : They are anxious about my health, no doubt. Let us read it. Lisette, go and find my spectacles.

LISETTE : Is it worth taking so much trouble ? Give me the note and I will read it. (*She reads*).

" Since our interview, sir, I have reflected on the proposed marriage and I find it suits neither party. You will permit me then, if you please, to withdraw my word as I release you from yours, and to remain your most faithful, most obedient servant,

Argante,

And underneath

Isabelle."

Now, without being punished, you can leave the service and go home ; here is your discharge fully signed.

GERONTE : What do you say to that, nephew ?

ERASTE : I am a little surprised. But you must pay no attention to that frivolous letter and oblige them to keep their word to you.

GERONTE : I shall be very careful not to follow your advice. All my senses are ravished with sudden pleasure. I don't know why I acted as my own enemy and hurled myself into this extreme peril ; fate and not love dragged me into this marriage in spite of myself.

LISETTE : I believe you without oath. What the deuce do you think love could be doing in a moribund body, so contrary to his fires ? Does love live with consumptions, catarrhs, obstructions, coughs ?

GERONTE (*to Madam Argante's Lackey*) : Wait a little downstairs and be in no hurry ; I shall reply to your mistress at once.

(Madam Argante's Lackey goes)

GERONTE : You see how promptly I make up my mind. I have suddenly abandoned this marriage.

LISETTE : Your name, sir, should be sung through the town ; this is what is called a deed of virility.

ERASTE : It was temerity at your age, when you are unhealthy, fever stricken, gouty and worse, to take a wife and in one and the same day make a funeral light out of the marriage torch.

GERONTE : But just now you praised my plan and my passion.

ERASTE : Just now you acted well, but now you act better.

GERONTE : Since I am at peace and wiser councils have cured me of the vapours of love and marriage, I must put in order the property I have received from Heaven and make a bequest of all in your favour by a proper will.

ERASTE : Ah ! I beseech you, sir, spare my suffering spirit this idea : I cannot hear you mention the word " will " without sighing, it seems to announce to me long before its time the fate which must follow it and the misfortune I shall not be able to survive : I shudder when I think of that cruel moment.

GERONTE : So much the better. It is the result of your good nature. I shall name you then my residuary legatee. I have still two relatives whose blood pleads on their behalf ; one is my brother's son, whose name you know,

a Norman gentleman, a mere beggar, I am told ; the other is a widow of small means, my sister's daughter and therefore my niece, who some time ago married in Maine a certain old baron with no property but his ancestors. Having regard for the sincere friendship I once had for their father and their mother, I wish to leave each of them twenty thousand crowns in cash.

LISETTE : Twenty thousand crowns ! That's an exorbitant legacy. A nephew from lower Normandy, a niece from Maine, are to enjoy a fortune like that merely to go to law, to purchase law-suits at home by the dozen ? Fie ! It's three quarters too much for two such beggarly rogues.

GERONTE : I have never seen them. But I can tell you that they have both chosen to write me that they will soon be in Paris to see me, embrace me, and then return home content. I think you will not be sorry if I leave them something to live on and uphold their gentility.

ERASTE : Are you not master of your own property, sir ? I shall think it good whatever you do.

LISETTE : And I think the last clause a bad one, and I oppose this bequest with all my power. But you have forgotten the lackey is waiting.

GERONTE : I will send him off and be back in a moment.

LISETTE : Have you forgotten that your right arm has been seized with paralysis for the past month and that you can neither write nor sign ?

GERONTE : That is true ; my nephew shall come with me and I will dictate him a letter in a manner which will heat Madam Argante's spleen ; of that I am well assured. Come, Eraste, follow me.

ERASTE : To obey you is my one law.

(Eraste, Geronte and his lackey go out)

LISETTE : Our affairs take on a new complexion and at last fortune smiles and beckons to us.

(*Enter Crispin*)

LISETTE : Ah ! There you are, Crispin, and where the deuce have you come from ?

CRISPIN : Faith, I have run about like a devil to serve you ; these notaries are people of difficult access. One was not at home, the other was in the town. I unearthed them where I was told—in a garden, at table, in a little nook, with ladies who appeared to me extremely handsome. I think they were drawing up deeds in secret. . . But they will be here in an hour at most.

LISETTE : Good. Do you know why Geronte sent for them here ?

CRISPIN : No.

LISETTE : To draw his marriage contract.

CRISPIN : The devil ! Would he play us such a trick at his age ?

LISETTE : A shaft launched by love had pierced Isabelle's poor heart through and through, and frustrating the common hope of his nephews he thought of making an heir for himself ; but Heaven has ordered otherwise and he is now thinking of making a will in which your master is to be named legatee.

CRISPIN : He could not do better for him or for us. The news is too good ; in consideration of it I must kiss and re-kiss you, faith ! with all my heart, and a flood of joy and affection, as I congratulate you. . . The love which occupies me. . . The news is charming and is worth a treasure by itself. My dear girl, I must kiss you again.

LISETTE : Be discreet and more modest in your transports.

CRISPIN : Excuse me if my joy carried the matter too far.

LISETTE : But in this wicked world there is no perfect good and nothing ever goes exactly as we desire ; he is putting an unfortunate clause in his will.

CRISPIN : Tell me what it is, my dear.

LISETTE : He leaves forty thousand crowns in cash to two distant relatives he has never seen.

CRISPIN : Forty thousand crowns of hard liquid money ! Why that is the best part of the estate. It is on the cash I set the highest value. You have lied, my dear Monsieur Geronte, this shall not be, I assure you ; you have reckoned in too great a hurry without me. And who are these relatives ?

LISETTE : One is a gentleman of lower Normandy, living somewhere between Falaise and Caen ; the other is a baroness, a widow without a dower, who usually lives in Maine, litigious if ever a woman was, (so I have often been told) one who loses thirty out of twenty-five suits every year.

CRISPIN : To have such good luck in law-suits is to gather the quintessence of the profession. We must make her lose this one too.

LISETTE : They will both be here soon. My dear Crispin, you must find in your brain, as if it were an arsenal, some new ruse to prevent Geronte from making this bequest to them.

CRISPIN : Has he ever seen these two relatives ?

LISETTE : Never. He has only heard by letter that they are coming to Paris to visit him.

CRISPIN : My face is not very familiar to him ?

LISETTE : Geronte, as you know, has hardly ever seen you, and, to tell you the truth, I am convinced he has no idea of your face.

CRISPIN : Good. Does my master know about this dangerous project, his uncle's intention and the harm which is being done him ?

LISETTE : Only too well ; in his heart he rages at it and wishes someone would divert this storm.

CRISPIN : I will be that someone, I promise you. These relatives shall have none of the estate, and I mean

Geronte to hate them so much he will disinherit them ; more, he will curse them and their descendents for ever and all the children of their posterity.

LISETTE : What ! Crispin, you can. . .

CRISPIN : There, set your mind at rest ; the prize promised me will make everything easy, for I am to marry you if. . .

LISETTE : Agreed. . . But then. . .

CRISPIN : But what ?

LISETTE : You seem to me rather a rake.

CRISPIN : Let us not upbraid each other.

LISETTE : Your indiscretions are well known.

CRISPIN : We are even ; do I not know yours ?

LISETTE : You are in debt on all sides and will be for a long time.

CRISPIN : That is something I share with men of quality. But you are wrong to trouble me on this point ; the uncle's will pays the debts ; and he will pay them for me, though he does not know it.

But someone is coming.

LISETTE : It is Geronte. Good-bye and away with you. Go and wait for me downstairs ; I will soon come and tell you what to say and do in your part.

CRISPIN : Why, I know it already by heart ; people with their wits about them need no prompter.

(Crispin goes)

(Enter Geronte and Eraste)

GERONTE *(holding a letter)* : In this letter I talk to the mother as she deserves ; I wish someone would tell me how she receives my little compliment ; I think she will certainly be surprised.

ERASTE : If you like to entrust the letter to me, sir, I promise to put it in her hands myself and to tell you what she says and does when she reads it.

GERONTE: But would it be correct for them to see you in person?

ERASTE: Nothing could give me greater joy, sir.

GERONTE: Tell her again by word of mouth to give up any thought of a marriage I value so little. . .

ERASTE: I know the whole secret of your intentions.

GERONTE: And that I am about to name you legatee immediately, to give you all my property.

ERASTE: I know their minds; they will both die of vexation. Be at rest; I know what to say and I will return and tell you what happens.

(Eraste goes)

GERONTE: Yes, since I have made this generous resolve I feel myself lighter and more healthy by half.

LISETTE: You have done what you ought to do, sir. But I see someone coming.

(Enter M. Clistorel)

LISETTE: It is your apothecary, Monsieur Clistorel.

GERONTE: *(to Clistorel)*: Ah! Heaven keep you in this place! I am brisker and more cheerful when I see you.

CLISTOREL *(angrily)*: Good-morning, sir, good-morning.

GERONTE: If I know anything about it, you appear angry. What?

CLISTOREL: I have reason to be.

GERONTE: What has set your spleen so strongly in motion?

CLISTOREL: What has done it?

GERONTE: Yes.

CLISTOREL: Your follies.

GERONTE: What!

CLISTOREL : Indeed, I have just heard a pretty piece of news which delights me.

GERONTE : Ah ! What is it, sir ?

CLISTOREL : At your age are you not ashamed to commit an extravagance like this ?

GERONTE : But what is it ?

CLISTOREL : In spite of your grey hair you still need a few grains of hellebore. I was told in the town, and it is a certain fact, that you have formed a plan to marry.

LISETTE : What ! Is that all ?

CLISTOREL : Why ! Could anyone commit a greater folly in life ?

GERONTE : And suppose it were so ! Why should you exclaim against it ? You were re-married yourself a month ago.

CLISTOREL : It is the same thing indeed ! Come, have you the courage and male vigour requisite for marriage ? I think you are ludicrous ! And you have some reason to compare yourself to me ! I made fourteen children with my first wife, Madame Clistorel (God rest her soul !) and if death does not interrupt me in my labours I hope to make as many with the second.

LISETTE : It will be a most worthy deed.

CLISTOREL : Believe me, your sickly body is not fit for that sort of fencing. I have read in Hippocrates—no matter where—a sure aphorism ; there is no middle course : “ Every old man who takes a stirring and over-brisk wench attacks his life with his own dagger.”
Virgo libidinosa senem jugulat.

LISETTE : What, Monsieur Clistorel ! you know Latin ! Some day you will be making yourself a doctor.

CLISTOREL : I ? Heaven preserve me from it ! They are all asses, or at least three quarters of them : they have pestered me a hundred times in the suit they have foolishly brought against us ; but I alone forced the whole Faculty to submit. They wanted to force all apothecaries

to compound and place in position their clysters themselves and to make our apprentices nothing but assistants.

LISETTE : Fie ! These doctors are quaint fellows !

CLISTOREL : It would have been a fine sight to behold me in my spectacles performing these secret functions like a young apprentice ! It was putting us to the A.B.C. when we are sixty. Do you see what an affront it would have been to the whole body ?

GERONTE : In this proceeding you did well to uphold the contest to the end.

CLISTOREL : Rather than yield I was resolved to eat my shop and even my mortar.

LISETTE : Indeed, their scheme was a very foolish one.

CLISTOREL : When I settle to it, I am more stubborn than a mule.

GERONTE : You were right ; they wanted to be offensive to you. But what have I done to anger you ?

CLISTOREL : What have you done ? You want to take a wife and die of the consequences and then all the blame will fall on me. You take a wife ! Why, you are mad !

GERONTE : Sir. . .

CLISTOREL : It would be better to wring your neck.

GERONTE : But, sir. . .

CLISTOREL : Take good medicine, good syrups and soothing drugs ; good catholicon. . .

GERONTE : Sir. . .

CLISTOREL : Good senna, good refined extract of polychrest salt. . .

GERONTE : Sir, one word. . .

CLISTOREL : Good tartar-emetic, a good strong diuretic clyster : That is what you need. But a wife. . .

GERONTE : But. . .

CLISTOREL : My shop is closed to you for ever. And if he needs. . .

LISETTE : Sir. . .

CLISTOREL : In extreme danger, the slightest lenitive,

the least apozem, a drop of honey or decoction. . . I will see him burst like an old musket first ! Oh ! a handsome youth to set up housekeeping !

LISETTE : But Monsieur Clistorel. . .

CLISTOREL : A delightful marriage ! A handsome little darling !

LISETTE : Sir, listen to us. . .

CLISTOREL : No, no, I want nothing more to do with you. Servant, servant.¹ (*Goes*)

LISETTE : Devil take you ! Well, I never saw a creature like that before. Measure him properly and I believe he is no taller than his syringe, yet he makes the noise of three. These little abortions are all of a riotous temper.

GERONTE : He will never come back ; I am distressed that he has gone.

LISETTE : For this one, you shall have a thousand immediately. You must choose one of my friends who has recently become an apothecary and has promised me to supply you cheaply, to give you extra syrup at a low price, cassia, senna, rhubarb, all second hand, which will have more effect and work better than what is sold you at four times the price.

GERONTE : Let him come and see me.

LISETTE : I shall not fail to.

GERONTE : Let us go and rest. Lisette, follow my steps. This Monsieur Clistorel has stirred up my spleen.

LISETTE : And remember, when you are quiet, to do me a little turn in your will.

GERONTE : I shall do so. (*Aside*) Provided it costs me nothing.

(*They go out*)

END OF ACT II

¹ This scene is imitated from Molière's *Le Malade Imaginaire*, act iii. sc. vi.

ACT III

(*Geronte and Lisette*)

GERONTE : Eraste does not return with the reply.

LISETTE : And, if you please, why should you trouble yourself so much about it ? Let it suffice that you ought to be pleased with yourself ; you never showed more heroism than when you broke off this tragi-comic marriage.

GERONTE : On this occasion I am pleased with myself, and Monsieur Clistorel is quite right. It would have been throwing myself head first to the bottom of the river with a stone round my neck.

LISETTE : Ah ! It was a hundred times worse than that. But now all goes well.

CRISPIN (*dressed as a country gentleman, outside, knocking*) : Hola ! Who's there ? Hola ! Everyone dead here, lackey, valet, maid ? Nobody comes, however much I knock and shout ? May the devil fly away with the house !

LISETTE : Eh ! who the deuce is knocking at our door in that way. (*She opens the door*) : What do you want, sir ? What demon troubles you ? Is this the way to visit a sick man ? (*Aside*) : Lord forgive me ! It is Crispin ! Faith ! it is he indeed.

CRISPIN (*whispers to Lisette*) : You are not wrong, my

dear, it is I. (*Aloud*): Good-day, good-day, my girl. In the town I was told one Geronte is domiciled here, can he be spoken with?

LISETTE: Why not? There he is.

CRISPIN (*Shaking his arm*): Parbleu! I am very glad of it. Shake hands, my dear sir. I am your valet, devil take me. Shake hands at once. I am so transported by pleasure I can't express it sufficiently.

GERONTE: The man is certainly trying to tear me limb from limb.

CRISPIN: You appear to be surprised as greatly as a man can be. I see you have some difficulty in recognising me; my features are new to you; and do you know why? Because you never saw me before.

GERONTE: So I believe.

CRISPIN: But my late father Alexandre Choupille, a Norman gentleman, took to wife a girl, who, they say, was once your sister. She brought me forth at the end of four months. My father was angry at so much diligence but a sensible friend told him confidentially that it was indeed true my mother did not yet exactly observe the order of time in making children, but that this was an error not unheard of in women and that she had only erred chronologically.

GERONTE: Chronologically!

LISETTE: Indeed a woman cannot calculate as a man would do.

CRISPIN: Well, this female, who was so prompt in conceiving that sometimes when I reflect on it I feel ashamed of her, by bringing me forth either in disgrace or honour, made me your nephew since she was your sister.

GERONTE: Learn, nephew, (if by chance you are my nephew), that you are a fool from the discourse you hold. My sister was modest and no one can reproach her that she was ever seen to stumble in her honour.

CRISPIN: So I think; however, while she was alive it

was held that her virtue tottered a little. But however that may be, whether I am bastard or legitimate, whether I came into the world too soon or too late, I am your nephew, whatever envy says ; and I am your heir come from Normandy on purpose to receive your estate.

GERONTE : You did well, and I praise your intention. When are you going back ?

CRISPIN : Did you want to come with me ? It depends on the time you have to live. Be assured, uncle, I shall never leave you until I have seen you nailed down and well enclosed, comfortably resting inside four deal planks.

LISETTE (*whispers to Geronte*) : You have a nephew there, sir, if I may say so, who speaks his mind with every freedom.

GERONTE (*whispers to Lisette*) : To speak truth, he terrifies me.

CRISPIN : I am convinced from your humour that the estate will be large and that I shall have gold to use by the handful ; for they say you are a miser, a niggard. I know that for a *sou* you would let yourself be birched with heroic ardour in the public square. I have even been told that in more than one place you have acquired the title of usurer and skinflint.

GERONTE : Do you know, nephew, you who hold such language to me, that if I had the use of my two arms I should make you leave by the window ?

CRISPIN : Me ?

GERONTE : Yes, you ; leave this house at once.

CRISPIN : Ah ! by my faith, you amuse me when you talk like that. You are the one to leave and pass through the door. The house belongs to me ; but I will permit you to live and die in it.

LISETTE : Ah ! Heavens ! What a scoundrel !

GERONTE (*in a whisper*) : Where am I ?

CRISPIN : Come, my dear, take me to the best bedroom.

Is it next to yours ? I find you to my liking ; and at night we can converse together on a level.¹ Good cheer, large fires ; break in the cellar to furnish us with full jugs of liquor : seize on everything ; the old man has a wide back and we can boldly gnaw him to the bones. Uncle, I shall need this evening a hundred new louis in cash, as an advance on the inheritance ; if not, by your leave, to-morrow morning I shall set fire to the house with my own hands.

GERONTE (*aside*) : Great gods ! Was such insolence ever seen before ?

LISETTE (*whispers to Geronte*) : He is no nephew, sir, but a devil ; use gentle means to get rid of him.

GERONTE : Nephew, you are wrong to torment with such haughtiness an uncle at his last agony ; let me finish my sad life in peace and you shall inherit everything on the day of my death.

CRISPIN : Agreed. But when will that day be ?

GERONTE : At every step a pitiless death continually dogs me and at most I have only four days to live.

CRISPIN : I give you six. But after, ventrebleu ! don't break your word to me or I will soon have you buried alive or dead. I shall leave you. Uncle, once more, keep your promise or I shall keep mine.

(*Goes*)

LISETTE : Ah ! What sort of a man is that ! What sort of a nephew have your relatives given you there ?

GERONTE : He is not my nephew. My sister was too discreet to bring up her son with such an air of savagery ; he is an arrant brute, a madman.

LISETTE : And yet to look at him, he had something of your air. Something shines in his eyes and in his features ; in short, he plainly belongs to the family.

¹ " *But à but.*"

GERONTE : By my faith, if he does belong to it, he does it small honour. A vile relative !

LISETTE : And will you have the heart to leave this fine gentleman your property, such a round sum, twenty thousand crowns in cash ?

GERONTE : Leave him my property ! I would rather bury it a hundred times forever !

LISETTE : Faith ! If I may trust my forebodings, I see your nephew will not have gained much by his journey, and that the poor devil arrived to-day would have done as well to stay at home.

GERONTE : If he bases his kitchen on my property alone I assure you he will die of starvation and that he will have no reason to laugh at my expense.

LISETTE : That is very well done ; people must be taught how to live. All these greedy nephews are made the same way, they cannot hide their perfidious natures and they claim that an old uncle is sufficiently obliged to them if they do not knock his brains out.

(Enter Eraste)

But Eraste has returned and will tell us how everything went off.

GERONTE : You kept us waiting long enough ! You left me in a great difficulty. A wretched nephew fell in upon me unexpectedly. I needed your presence here to restrain the excess of his impudence. Lisette was a witness of it.

LISETTE : Ah ! the base gallows-bird ! And Monsieur Geronte was about to leave him property !

GERONTE : I have quite changed my mind ; I give you my word he shall never have a farthing of mine.

ERASTE : I have acquitted myself of my commission ; everything turned out as we intended. Your letter produced an effect which enchants me. First of all they

showed an indifferent mind ; they attempted to hide their feelings under a false air of scorn and appeared to me to care little about it : but when I told them that to-day you are about to make me the sole legatee of your property (for you told me to speak in that tone). . .

GERONTE : Yes, I promised you. That is my intention.

ERASTE : They both showed a surprise from which they will not recover in six months.

GERONTE : I am convinced of it.

ERASTE : But listen to this, which will surprise you, as it surprised me. It was, that Madame Argante, liking your family, frankly proposed to give me her daughter and so by a mutual attention to redeem the word given on both sides.

GERONTE : And what did you reply to these fine proposals ?

ERASTE : That I was unwilling to follow in your steps as a rival before I had found out your feelings in the matter and, in addition, secured your assent.

GERONTE : Don't embarrass yourself with a marriage yet ; let my example serve to make you discreet.

LISETTE : And I should strongly approve this wedding and this choice ; it is what should be and I give it my support. Monsieur Eraste should follow this desire ; not you, who ought to renounce life.

GERONTE : Renounce life ! And why ? Am I dead yet, if you please ?

LISETTE : I don't know, sir, exactly what is the truth about it ; but everyone believes from your sad and gloomy appearance that you are nothing but a shade wandering on the edge of the grave and that, for reasons which make you delay it, you have not yet had yourself buried.

GERONTE : You will wear my patience out at length with speeches like that and your air of insolence.

LISETTE : I cannot paint over the truth, sir ; I say what I think truthfully.

(Enter a Lackey)

LACKEY : There is a lady in heavy mourning downstairs, sir, with her attendants, come to visit you ; she says she is your niece.

GERONTE : More relatives !

LACKEY : Shall I show her up ?

GERONTE : No ! I forbid you to.

LISETTE : You must not treat her in this way, sir ; you must not shut your door in her face. *(To the Lackey)* Bring her up.

(The Lackey goes)

LISETTE *(to Geronte)* : Control yourself a little : the niece will have a mind better constituted than the nephew. Among so many relatives it would be the very devil if there were not one that was reasonable.

(Enter Geronte's Lackey with Crispin disguised as a widow, the train carried by a little page)

CRISPIN *(makes curtsies to Geronte's Lackey who opens the door. The little page goes)*.

(To Geronte) : Permit this embrace, if you please, to show my joy and ravishment ; I see an uncle at last, an uncle I love, whom I honour a hundred times more than myself.

GERONTE *(to Eraste)* : She is gentle and polite. Give my niece an armchair at once.

CRISPIN *(to Geronte's Lackey)* : Do not stir, if you please ; respect forbids me. *(To Geronte in a tone of respect)* : An armchair in my uncle's presence ! A stool will do.

(The Lackey gives Crispin a stool)

GERONTE : I am pleased with my relative, already.

ERASTE : She has good manners indeed and her figure is charming.

(The Lackey gives Geronte an armchair, a chair to Eraste, a stool to Lisette, and goes)

CRISPIN : Fie ! You are jesting, I look quite dreadful. At one time I was not so big, but you know the result of a fertile marriage and what it is to have young children ; it spoils the figure, completely.

LISETTE : You would still pass for a girl, I assure you.

CRISPIN : I have had a sad experience of marriage. At twenty my husband left me a mother and a widow. You may easily suppose that after so early a death, made as I am, with some attractions, I could easily have remarried ; but the sad memory of the poor deceased compels me to devour my troubles in secret. I have many troublesome days and worse nights ; but the sad insomnias of widowhood shall not ravish dark perfidies from me ; if I can I wish to carry to the dead a heart which has burned with only one fire.

ERASTE : Plighted faith was never carried farther ; these sentiments are worthy of an Artemisia.

GERONTE *(to Crispin)* : As your husband left you a mother and widow at twenty, he did not leave you many children, I suppose ?

CRISPIN : Only nine ; but, with a heart swollen with bitterness, I was delivered of a posthumous child two years after.

LISETTE : Two years after ! What fidelity ! Posterity will never believe it.

GERONTE *(to Crispin)* : May I ask, if it is not troubling you, what pressing business caused you to leave Maine ?

CRISPIN : The desire to see you was my first object, but in addition a law-suit which has foolishly been brought against me, concerning a certain banal oven

situated in my estate. At first I moved a declinatory ; they proceeded ; I pleaded a formal impediment ; and without prejudice I antedated my appeal. The case was referred back to a lower tribunal ; was argued and I received an interlocutory !¹

LISETTE : An interlocutory ! What kind of insult is that ? And you allowed yourself to be interlocuted ! A woman of honour see herself interlocuted !

ERASTE : Why does the word offend you so much ? It is a law term.

LISETTE : It's anything you please, but as long as I live no judge shall interlocute me. The word is immodest and I am shocked by it. I shall never allow myself to be interlocuted.

GERONTE : She is crazy and sometimes has paroxysms . . . she does not talk of law-suits as well as you do.

CRISPIN : This suit is not the only thing which brings me here and has made me leave Maine so abruptly. I have learned, sir, from people worthy of credence, who have informed me of you, and whom I believe, that you are a man stained with more vices than one, a drunkard, a gambler. . .

ERASTE : How ! What caprice. . .

CRISPIN : That day and night you haunt certain rendezvous where honesty suffers and modesty groans.

GERONTE : Is it to me you address this discourse, if you please ?

CRISPIN : Yes, uncle, to you. Is there anything in it that can wound you, since it is copied from truth ?

GERONTE (*aside*) : I don't know where I am !

CRISPIN : It has been added even, that for a very long time you have led an unworthy and criminal life with this young woman and that you have several children by her.

LISETTE : With me ! Just Heavens ! The scandal-

¹ This set of law terms is mere jargon.

mongers ! Who will they meddle with next ? Is it their business ?

GERONTE : I don't know what restrains my anger.

CRISPIN : And so, from the reports of a thousand honest people we have caused your relatives, sir, to meet ; and to prevent you in your extreme disorder from consuming our property and destroying yourself, we have resolved with one accord to have you declared incapable of managing your affairs, in a legal manner.

GERONTE : Me ! Me incapable !

LISETTE : Ah ! Heaven ! What a family !

CRISPIN : We know what your life has been with this woman and we want to prevent your being able to make a marriage with her *in extremis*.

GERONTE (*rising*) : Leave this house, Madam, and see that you never hope to set foot in it again ! Leave the house, I say, and without delay. . .

CRISPIN : What ! Beat a widow and violate her ! Help ! Call the neighbours ! Murder ! I am assassinated !

GERONTE : There's a vile hussy, I vow !

CRISPIN : What ! You dare to blaspheme your own blood ? This may go far towards having you imprisoned !

LISETTE : Imprison Monsieur Geronte !

CRISPIN : And don't you play the part, you will be put in the Salpêtrière.¹

LISETTE : In the Salpêtrière !

CRISPIN : Yes, my friend, and without any noise. We know only too much about your irregularities.

ERASTE : We must get to the bottom of this mystery. Let someone go at once and fetch me a commissary.

CRISPIN : A commissary to me ! Am I game for a commissary, if you please ?

ERASTE : We shall see ; and very soon we shall know if people can be insulted in their own homes with such a clamour. Uncle, retire to your own room ; I will account to you for everything in a moment.

¹ The French Bridewell.

GERONTE: Ouf ! This day will be the last of my life !

LISETTE (*to Crispin*): Wretch ! You bring an uncle to his deathbed ! Horrible relatives from Maine and Caen ! The whole family deserves the pillory.

(*Geronte and Lisette go*)

ERASTE: Is it true, Crispin ? And your sincere enthusiasm. . .

CRISPIN: Send for a commissary, sir, I await him with firmness.

ERASTE: Just Heaven ! It is you. I am not wrong.

CRISPIN: Ventrebleu. Yes, it is I. . . You have just given me a cruel upbraiding !

ERASTE: Your modesty suffered from such an outrage.

CRISPIN: My desire to serve you put me into these clothes ; and, as you see, my plan succeeded. I have conjured the storm with certain words ; I have played here the part of two relatives ; and in their name I have said such bitter things that, on my faith ! they will both be disinherited.

ERASTE: What !

CRISPIN: If you had seen me just now doing marvels as a country gentleman with a feather above my ear, a gray hat and a long rapier at my side, you would have been enchanted by my lower Normandy air ! But to speak truth, this headdress inspires me with more intrepidity than I can tell you ; in this garb I am twenty times less afraid, its skill and artfulness have passed into my soul. How much wit and deceit one has in these clothes !

ERASTE: And so the uncle is disgusted with his nephew and is making a will which is to crown all my wishes ! Is there a happier mortal in the world ?

(*Enter Lisette*)

LISETTE: Ah ! Sir, here is a terrible accident to tell you : Monsieur Geronte is dead !

ERASTE : Ah ! Heaven ! is it possible ?

CRISPIN : What ! Is Monsieur Eraste's uncle defunct ?

LISETTE : Alas ! He is little better, the poor man is so low. When he reached his room, he could scarcely drag himself along ; he fell on the bed breathless and without strength, stiffened his arms and a suffocation suddenly cut off his breathing. In short, despite my help, he fell down without voice, without feeling, without pulse, without consciousness.

ERASTE : I am in despair. It was that last turn you gave him, Crispin, which caused his death.

CRISPIN : I, sir ! I am not the cause of his death. Frankly now, the defunct took things in the wrong way ; why did he get into such a state over words ? I was after his property, not his life.

ERASTE : Let us not despair of his life yet ; he often falls into a trance which looks like death and greatly alarms us.

LISETTE : Ah ! Sir, this time he is already half dead. I know him well and I saw he is sure to die and that he cannot last more than an hour.

ERASTE : Just Heavens ! Crispin, what an event ! And my uncle will die without making a will ! And by this cruel death I shall be frustrated in my hopes of obtaining the charming Isabelle ! Fortune ! I feel indeed the effects of your displeasure.

LISETTE : It is for me to weep and I lose more than you.

CRISPIN : Come, come, my dear children, we must keep our heads and present a firm face to the storm ; this is not a time to be scattering tears. Let us show a courage above misfortunes.

ERASTE : What use is courage to us ? What can we do ?

CRISPIN : First of all, we must run with salutary energy to the strong-box, fathom the desks, unfurnish the house, seize on all the effects. Go and shut the street-door and bring back the keys, for fear of interruption.

LISETTE : Nobody shall come in without my permission.

CRISPIN : Don't allow the desire of booty and rich pillage to carry your boiling courage too far ; above all let us keep our judgment in action. Fate conspires in vain against this will ; before so much property shall pass into profane hands I shall call up the ghost of the defunct Geronte ; and, in spite of envy, you shall have on your side, Lisette, Crispin, Hell and the gods !

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

(*Eraste and Crispin*)

ERASTE (*holding Geronte's pocket book*): Ah! My dear Crispin, I have lost all hope. My uncle will never recover consciousness. Medicine and doctors are superfluous here; the poor man has not an hour to live at most. The full legacy he intended to make me will never enrich me, Crispin, as you see.

CRISPIN: Lisette and I too counted on a little legacy to complete our plans.

ERASTE: Although a cruel fate, contrary to our desires, exhausts the shafts of its rage against us, our troubles will not be wholly vain and fruitless; forty thousand crowns which I hold in my hands, the sad and fatal relics of an unfortunate shipwreck, shall be placed in safety from the storm. These are all good notes I have found on him.

CRISPIN (*trying to take the notes*): Let me share your troubles with you. Until the rest comes, this small lenitive may console us for so disastrous a stroke.

ERASTE: True, dear Crispin, but you know this constitutes but a quarter of the property which I might expect from the estate for my trouble and which the will gave me the right to expect: Houses in Paris, land, title-deeds, opened more charming attractions to my heart. Not that the desire of gain and the thirst for wealth caused me to feel their unworthy weaknesses; my heart is

captured by a more noble fire. This was the price of my wedding Isabelle, and only with this property and these advantages can I obtain her mother's consent. Without the will I lose, and lose for ever, a property upon which depends the happiness of my life.

CRISPIN : I understand your reasons ; they are very plausible : but these are the terrible and unforeseen blows which confound every human mind and overcome the boldest virtue. O death ! you might have waited another hour before showing the old man his last resting place ; then you would have left us all in complete repose and everything would have gone off perfectly.

ERASTE : Must a hope founded upon justice pass, evaporate, in sterile regrets ? Crispin, can you not parry this fatal blow and find some prompt remedy for my distress ? Just now you were meditating some noble achievement ; it is in great dangers that a great courage appears.

CRISPIN : Yes, just now I thought I could repair this disappointment ; but at present I have failed and remain dry. Anyone else would be equally sterile in such a case. If it were needed, by chance, to make away with, to appropriate with a nimble hand, a will in which you were not well treated—perhaps I might there exercise my talent and show my powers by some happy stroke ; but to find a will which does not exist ! The devil and all his gang, reduced to this point, would break their heads against it in vain ; and yet, sir, the devil is no fool.

ERASTE : Do you want to confound me, to reduce me to despair ?

(Enter Lisette)

LISETTE *(to Eraste)* : The notaries have just come, sir. I have put them both in the lower room. There. And what is to be done, if you please ?

ERASTE : My embarrassment grows every moment.

My dear child, do what you like. Do they know my uncle has lost consciousness and cannot speak ?

LISETTE : No, not yet, I think.

ERASTE : Crispin. . .

CRISPIN : Sir ?

ERASTE : Alas !

CRISPIN : Alas !

ERASTE : Just Heavens !

CRISPIN : Ah !

ERASTE : Tell me, what shall we do ?

CRISPIN : Anything you like.

ERASTE : What ! Shall we send them away ?

CRISPIN : Eh ! What do you expect to do with them ?
What good to ourselves can we get out of them ?

LISETTE : I will go and tell them they have only to retire.

ERASTE (*stopping Lisette*) : Wait a little still. I feel overcome. Crispin, you will see me expire before your eyes.

CRISPIN : I shall soon follow you ; I am killed by grief.

LISETTE : And I shall not last long ! But must we see the three of us crushed at once, as if by a thunder-bolt ?

CRISPIN : Wait . . . It occurs to me . . .
The plan is a bizarre one, but it might by chance . . .
I catch a glimpse . . . I am lost and see nothing but confusion.

LISETTE : Plague take the animal and his vision !

ERASTE : Tell us the plan your mind suggests to you.

LISETTE : Come, my dear Crispin, try to see something.

CRISPIN : Let me reflect a little . . . Yes, that is . . .
No . . . But if . . . Why not ? . . . It might . . .

LISETTE : Don't reflect so long ; the notaries downstairs are getting impatient ; everything here depends on speed.

CRISPIN : True ; but I am bringing forth a plan to surpass the effort of every human mind. You who seem

so lively and sharp in everything, exercise your imagination on this subject ; let us see your wit.

LISETTE : That is a function I leave to you. Who could be equal to you in roguery ? Love ought to re-invigorate your skill.

CRISPIN : Peace . . . Silence . . . I have an increase of thought. Ventrebleu ! I have it.

LISETTE : Good.

CRISPIN : Seated in an armchair . . .

LISETTE : Very good.

CRISPIN : Don't disturb my inspiration. A large fur cap pulled over my ears ; the shutters well closed . . .

LISETTE : You think of prodigies.

CRISPIN : Yes, sir ; to-day you shall be the heir as you desire, I promise you. Come, Lisette, come, let us reanimate our zeal ; love calls and guides us in this scheme. Go and fetch me some clothes of the defunct uncle's, his sick gown, his night-cap ; the spoils of the dead shall make our victory.

LISETTE : I should like to erect a trophy to your glory ; I run to serve you. I return on my steps.

(Lisette goes)

ERASTE : Crispin, you draw me back from the gates of death. If your plan succeeds as we desire I shall make you happy for the rest of your days. I shall be the heir ! and, by the same means, I shall wed the object which alone constitutes my happiness ! Ah ! Crispin !

CRISPIN : But a secret terror seizes my senses, alarms and troubles me. If Justice comes to know the facts, she is a little brutal and grasps by the coat-collar. I shall have to make a false signature, and my frightened hand refuses its aid to the scheme which charms my soul.

ERASTE : Your uneasiness is unfounded. For the past two or three months Geronte has been unable to use his

fingers ; and so his signature, otherwise so necessary, is not required in our case, as you see ; you will say that you cannot sign.

CRISPIN : I let myself be convinced by good reasons and I feel my courage suddenly renewed with the enthusiasm I need for so great a work.

(Enter Lisette with Geronte's clothes)

LISETTE : There, wholesale and retail, is all old Geronte's equipment as you asked for it.

CRISPIN (*undressing*) : Let us lose no time and dress me quickly. Sir, put your hand to the plough, if you please. The gown : quickly, put my arms into it. Ah ! clumsy valet ! Each one put a stocking on. There, now the handkerchief. Put the cap on me, quick. The slippers. Good. The whole dress is fantastic.

LISETTE : Yes, there is the dead man. Let us cast off our grief, Geronte is not dead since he lives again in Crispin. Those are his features, his air ; they will certainly mistake him for Geronte.

CRISPIN : But suppose I put on his diseases with his clothes ?

ERASTE : Fear nothing ; arm yourself with resolution.

CRISPIN : Faith ! I feel a certain emotion already. I don't know whether fear is a little laxative or whether it has a purgative virtue.

LISETTE : I will put you into this old fur cloak he always wrapped round him on clyster days.

CRISPIN : You can call the notaries when you like ; I am now in my mortuary clothes.

LISETTE : I will bring them here in a moment.

CRISPIN : Support me well, both of you, in this affair.

(Lisette goes)

CRISPIN : You, sir, close doors and windows, if you

please. An indiscreet gleam might expose me. Pull up that table ; bring that armchair nearer. That badly veiled daylight hurts my eyes. Draw the curtains well ; let nothing betray us.

ERASTE : May the device succeed by a fortunate destiny ! If I dare to bring myself to this extremity, I obey necessity in spite of myself. I hear a noise.

CRISPIN (*throwing himself quickly into an armchair*) : Let us think of the ceremony. And don't leave me sir at the last gasp.

ERASTE : A god, whose power serves as an excuse to lovers, will secure my pardon for these outrages !

(*Enter Lisette, M. Scruple, and M. Gaspard*)

LISETTE (*to the notaries*) : Come in, gentlemen, come in. (*To Crispin*) : Here are the two notaries ; you can put your affairs in order with them.

CRISPIN (*to the notaries*) : Gentlemen, although I am at my very end, I am delighted to see you both in perfect health. I wish I were still your age ; and if I were as well as you are I should not be thinking about making my will.

M. SCRUPLE : That should not distress you for a moment ; nothing is beyond remedy : This ceremony has never shortened the life of any testator ; on the contrary, sir, the consolation of having disposed of his property spreads a sympathetic repose through the heart, a certain gentle, balsamic quietude, which passing afterwards into all the senses, renews the health in many cases.

CRISPIN : May Heaven treat me in that way ! Sit down, gentlemen. (*To Lisette*) : You, shut the door.

M. GASPARD : Generally, sir, we are careful to see that these secret acts pass without witnesses. It would be well if this gentleman would be kind enough to accompany the lady into the next room.

LISETTE : I cannot leave him for a moment.

ERASTE : My uncle will express his wishes on this point.

CRISPIN : These persons, gentlemen, are modest and discreet ; I can confide my last wishes to them and show them the excess of my affection.

M. SCRUPLE : We will act entirely as you wish. The deed shall be as it ought to be and it shall be reduced to the usual style.

(*He dictates to M. Gaspard, who writes*): In the presence of. . . were present. . . Geronte. (*Et cetera. To Crispin*) : And now tell us what you desire.

CRISPIN : First I wish my debts to be paid.

ERASTE : We shall not find many, I think.

CRISPIN : I owe my wine merchant four hundred francs—a rogue who lives in the next tavern.

M. SCRUPLE : Very good. And where do you wish to be buried, sir ?

CRISPIN : To tell you the truth, gentlemen, it matters nothing to me. But let care be taken above all not to put me too close to some evil pettifogging solicitor ; he would not fail to pick a quarrel with me ; every day there would be new proceedings and I should be forced to decamp again.

ERASTE : All shall be done according to your wishes, sir. I will take care of the funeral and the burial and I will spare nothing to make it conspicuous.

CRISPIN : No, nephew ; I want my interment to be made inexpensively and very modestly. It costs too much to die, on my conscience. I never liked expense in my life-time ; I can very well be buried for a crown.

LISETTE (*aside*) : The poor unfortunate is dying as he lived.

M. GASPARD : And now it is for you to tell us, if you please, the legacies you wish written in your will.

CRISPIN : That is what we are about to employ our-

selves with now. I name my nephew, Eraste, whom I love tenderly, sole, unique, and residuary legatee.

ERASTE (*pretending to weep*) : O too bitter grief !

CRISPIN : Leaving him all my goods, furniture, property, acquests, plate, ready money, contracts, houses, notes ; disinheriting, in so far as it is necessary, my relatives, nieces, nephews, born and to be born, and all my bastards, to whom God grant peace, if there should be any on the day of my death.

LISETTE (*affecting grief*) : This discourse cleaves my soul. Alas ! my poor master, I must then see you disappear for ever ?

ERASTE (*similarly*) : The property you offer has no charms for me, if it must be bought with your death.

CRISPIN : Item. I give and bequeath to Lisette here present. . .

LISETTE (*as before*) : Ah !

CRISPIN : Who stood me in lieu of maid servant for five years, in order that she may be joined to Crispin in lawful wedlock, not otherwise. . .

LISETTE (*falling as if in a swoon*) : Ah ! Ah !

CRISPIN : Support her, nephew. And to recompense the affection and zeal I have always found in her. . .

LISETTE (*pretending to cry*) : Great gods, what a good master I shall lose in him.

CRISPIN : Two thousand crowns in cash.

LISETTE (*as above*) : Ah ! Ah ! Ah !

ERASTE (*aside*) : Two thousand crowns ! The gallows-bird is mocking me.

LISETTE (*as before*) : I cannot bear it, I am suffocated with grief. I think I shall die.

CRISPIN : Which two thousand crowns shall be taken and collected from the ready money of my estate.

LISETTE (*to Crispin*) : Heaven grant you peace for having remembered me, and repay you a hundred times for your good deed ! (*Aside*) He promised he would not forget me.

ERASTE (*aside*) : The knave has played me a trick of his trade. (*Aloud to Crispin*) : That is all you wish to say, I think ?

CRISPIN : I have still three or four words to be set down in writing. Item. I leave and bequeath to Crispin. . .

ERASTE (*aside*) : To Crispin ! He has lost his wits, I think. What does he mean by it ?

CRISPIN : For his true and loyal services. . .

ERASTE (*aside*) : Ah ! The traitor !

CRISPIN : Which he has always rendered and ought to render to his master. . .

ERASTE : You don't know Crispin, uncle ; he is a bad valet, a drunkard and a rake, little deserving the good you wish to do him.

CRISPIN : I am convinced to the contrary, nephew ; I know Crispin a thousand times better than you. I desire, then, to bequeath him, in spite of those who envy him. . .

ERASTE (*aside*) : The dog !

CRISPIN : An annuity of fifteen hundred francs, to remember me in his prayers.

ERASTE (*aside*) : Ah ! What a betrayal !

CRISPIN : Do you think the present uncivil, nephew, or too little ?

ERASTE : What ! Fifteen hundred francs !

CRISPIN : Yes ; without which clause the present will be void, and for good reasons.

ERASTE : Are such legacies given to valets, uncle ? You cannot mean it.

CRISPIN : I know what I am doing. And my wits are not so weak and failing.

LISSETTE : But. . .

CRISPIN : If you anger me I shall leave him two thousand.

LISSETTE (*aside to Eraste*) : Don't make him obstinate,

I know his disposition. He will do it, sir, as he says.

CRISPIN : Is there not yet one of my friends to whom I can bequeath something ?

ERASTE (*aside*) : The rascal is still jesting at my restraint. He will leave me nothing at all if he goes on.

M. SCRUPLE (*to Crispin*) : Is that all ?

CRISPIN : Yes, sir.

LISETTE (*aside*) : Heaven be thanked !

M. GASPARD : The will is happily finished. (*To Crispin*) : Will you be pleased to sign ?

CRISPIN : I should greatly like to but I am prevented by paralysis which has held me by the right arm for several months.

M. GASPARD (*writing*) : And the said testator declares, at this place, that he is unable to sign his name, having been summoned according to statute.

CRISPIN : What a heavy burden it is to make a will ! I am free of it, but I am covered with sweat !

M. SCRUPLE (*to Crispin*) : You have no further need of our services ?

CRISPIN (*To M. Scruple*) : Leave me, if you please, the deed which has just been drawn up.

M. SCRUPLE : We cannot, sir ; this deed is an original and must remain in our hands ; I will soon return and bring you myself a copy.

ERASTE : You will do us a pleasure ; my uncle desires it and wishes to reward your care and trouble.

M. GASPARD : At present, sir, that is the least urgent matter.

CRISPIN : Lisette, show them down.

(*M. Scruple and Gaspard and Lisette go*)

CRISPIN (*replacing the table and chairs*) : Have I kept my word ? And do I know how to play a part and make a will, when occasion demands ?

ERASTE : Too well, for your own profit. Tell me, wretch, have you lost your wits to make a will so prejudicial to me ? To leave such a sum to Lisette ?

CRISPIN : Faith, it is not too much.

ERASTE : Two thousand crowns in cash !

CRISPIN : In such cases, sir, everyone must be pleased. Could I leave the poor girl less ?

ERASTE : What, traitor !

CRISPIN : She is slightly related to the family. Your uncle, if we may believe common talk, was not always so impotent and gouty ; and I had to leave her a small living to salve his soul and my conscience.

ERASTE : And your conscience ! And the fifteen hundred francs income payable to you every year which you bequeathed yourself so prudently, were they also to salve your conscience ?

CRISPIN : There is no need to take such offence, sir ; we can come to terms in a moment. Since this will we have just made, by which I constituted you residuary legatee, cannot have the honour to secure your approval, it must be torn up and thrown in the fire.

ERASTE : Heaven preserve me from it !

CRISPIN : Without forming any other project, let us leave the matter where your uncle placed it.

ERASTE : It would be a hundred times worse ; I should die of grief.

CRISPIN : From the bottom of my heart there rises a kind of burning remorse, a kind of repentance which weighs terribly on my stomach.

ERASTE : Let us go in, Crispin. I am shivering and I am convinced that we shall find my uncle dead, or at least that he is expiring at this very moment.

CRISPIN : Alas ! It was full time, on my faith, to put things in writing.

ERASTE : The laurel with which your brow has just been crowned cannot have too great or too swift a reward.

CRISPIN : Then, if you please, advance me a year of that income I gave myself ; you cannot give me a more charming pleasure.

ERASTE : We will see about it at more leisure.

(Enter Lisette)

LISETTE *(throwing herself in an armchair)* : Mercy ! Ah Heaven ! I am dying ; I am dead.

ERASTE *(to Lisette)* : What is it, child ? What makes you exclaim in that way ?

LISETTE : I am stifled. Ouf, ouf, fear prevents me from speaking.

CRISPIN : *(to Lisette)* : What sudden delirium has overtaken you ? Speak, will you ?

LISETTE : Geronte. . .

CRISPIN : Well ! Geronte. . .

LISETTE *(getting up quickly)* : Oh ! Take care of me !

CRISPIN : Will you make an end of your tale ?

LISETTE : A great black ghost. . .

ERASTE : What ? What do you say ?

LISETTE : Alas, dear sir, I am only telling you what I saw. After I had accompanied the notaries to the street, where the old man's death is announced already, where, in spite of me, a hawker tried to bring in the trappings of a funeral—I thought I heard the door open from the room in which your uncle was lying unguarded and, going up the stairs, I met face to face, Geronte on his feet, like a great ghost.

CRISPIN : Your mind is possessed with the fear of a dead man and deceives you and makes you see an imaginary ghost.

LISETTE : It is he, I tell you, he speaks . . . Ah ! *(She turns round, sees Crispin and takes him for Geronte, leaps up and hides in a corner, uttering a shriek of terror)*

CRISPIN : What are you shrieking at ?

LISETTE : Excuse me, my dear ; I took you for him. And so, shrieking, running, without turning my head, breathless and trembling, I rushed here to tell you that your uncle was only in one of his trances and is better again.

ERASTE : How persistently does Fortune with a turn of her wheel play with me and delude me !

LISETTE : O too flattering hope ! Projects so well conceived and better executed, what has become of you ?

CRISPIN : And so Fate returns us the defunct ! And miserly Acheron again releases his prey ! Great gods, you will it ! My courage is at an end. I know not where I am and I abandon everything. . .

ERASTE : You, whom I saw so great, so magnanimous — can a single reverse bring you to so weak and hesitating a condition ? Return to sentiments more worthy of you ; let us face the dangers ; and you, show your faith ; some stroke of fortune will release us from the difficulty.

CRISPIN : Are we to abuse another notary ?

ERASTE : Without loss of time I shall put these bank-notes into Isabelle's hands. They will make an effect and perhaps we shall derive an advantage from it which may serve towards our marriage. You, return to my uncle and take care to call for the aid he will need. I shall go immediately to return the sooner and to reassure you here with my presence.

(Goes)

CRISPIN : I am well off now with my will ! I can see my income being paid in a moment !

LISETTE : And my two thousand crowns, as the reward of my services !

CRISPIN : Just Heaven ! Save me from the hands of Justice ! All this is horrible and greatly disturbs me ; I fear I have passed my own death sentence !

END OF ACT IV

ACT V

(*Madam Argante, Isabelle, Eraste*)

MME ARGANTE (*to Eraste*) : What is your plan, what are you going to do ? Can I undertake the charge of these bank-notes ? I shall be suspected of having lent my aid in secret towards the success of your plans. Now that your uncle, in spite of his age, has fortunately regained the use of his senses, the best course is to take back these notes to him without any delay.

ERASTE : Madam, to-day is not the first occasion on which I have perceived the noble sentiments which reign in your soul. Neither you nor I propose to retain this property which cannot yet be ours, but I beg you to keep these notes a little longer ; Heaven will inspire me with the knowledge of what to do. I take it to witness that in what I have done, love has been my principle object. Ah ! to merit the charming Isabelle I have perhaps allowed my zeal to break out too much, but these amorous transports will be forgiven. (*To Isabelle*) : Madam, my excuse is written in your eyes.

ISABELLE (*to Eraste*) : Since I have my mother's consent to our union I can allow my sincere sentiments to appear. The property you may one day inherit has not determined my love for you in the least ; your person alone delights me and all the vain glitter of a fortune cannot dazzle a heart like mine.

ERASTE : If I obtain that heart, I wish for nothing more.

MME ARGANTE : All these fine sentiments are excellent in a book, but love alone, of whatever kind, was never a living ; and I tell you firmly that when people are married they never love each other except in proportion as they have money.

ERASTE : My uncle's convalescence now revives joy and hope in my heart, and I shall urge him to make a will.

MME ARGANTE : But have you nothing to fear from his resentment ? May not your taking these bank-notes dispose him to sentiments contrary to your desires ?

ERASTE : And that is the very reason which makes me bold to keep them a little longer. To see this hoard returned to his power he will grant anything without over-much resistance. In this peril, mademoiselle, you must be a little in league with us to-day. There they are, all good notes, which you must take, if you please.

ISABELLE : I !

ERASTE : Do not blush ; it is only to return them.

ISABELLE : But, sir, I do not know if I should accept this commission in this matter ; I shall be thought an accomplice in taking the notes. I am still a novice at restitution.

ERASTE : I hear a noise.

(Enter Crispin)

ERASTE : It is Crispin, I see. *(To Crispin)* : What's the matter with you ? You are beside yourself.

CRISPIN : Well, sir, well. As a man of courage, I must support the attack here, in faith. Monsieur Geronte approaches !

ERASTE : O Heaven ! *(To Madam Argante and Isabelle)* : For the moment allow me to take you to my rooms. It is still painful to me to be exposed to his sight ; let us

give time for his anger to evaporate ; and when the time comes we shall all work together towards the desired end. (*To Crispin*) : And you, stay here. See what humour he is in and inform me when it is time to appear.

(*Eraste, Madam Argante, and Isabelle go*)

CRISPIN : And now, thanks to Heaven, here we are in a pretty mess ! May God bring us out of these mishaps !

(*Enter Geronte and Lisette*)

GERONTE (*leaning upon Lisette*) : I cannot yet recover from my weakness ; I do not know where I am : the daylight hurts me ; and my weak brain still reels from the shock and is troubled with dark vapours. Was I long in this trance ?

LISETTE : Not so long as we expected. But your illness has put us all into a dismay, a disturbance, an agitation, a motion which it is not easy to describe. Ask Crispin, he can tell you.

CRISPIN : If you knew, sir, what we did when you were feeling the effects of your illness, the trouble I took and the care necessary to put your affairs in order as if it were yourself, you would be astonished ; and so astonished, you would not recover from it so quickly.

GERONTE : Where is my nephew ? His absence distresses me.

CRISPIN : Ah ! the poor lad. I doubt if he is still in this life.

GERONTE : What do you say ? What ?

CRISPIN : He was so overcome when he saw your eyes turned straight towards death that, thinking of nothing but his bitter grief, he went and flung himself. . .

GERONTE : Where ? In the river ?

CRISPIN : No sir, on his bed¹ ; where, bathed in tears, the unfortunate lad moans for his misfortunes.

¹ See *L'Amour Médecin* (Molière) act i., sc. vi.

GERONTE : Go and return him joy and tranquillity ; and tell him from me that Heaven restores him an uncle always filled with affection for him and who wishes to show him to-day the results of his gratitude.

CRISPIN : If he is still alive I will bring him with all speed.

(Goes)

GERONTE : But from what I see, Lisette, I must have been more ill than I thought.

LISETTE : For a whole hour we thought you were dead.

GERONTE : I must express my last wishes and make my will without loss of time. Have the notaries been ?

LISETTE : They have indeed.

GERONTE : Go and get them again and tell them at the same time I wish them to write for me.

LISETTE : They will soon return.

(Enter Eraste and Crispin)

CRISPIN *(to Eraste)* : Heaven has restored him to you.

ERASTE : Ah ! Could I expect this happiness ? I see my dear uncle once more ; and Heaven, sensible of my grief, mercifully allows me to embrace him ! After I thought him dead he appears to my sight !

GERONTE : Alas ! nephew, I am no better ; but I thank Heaven for prolonging my life because I shall be able to carry out my desire to leave you my property by a correct will.

LISETTE : This lad loves you tenderly, sir. If you could have seen the crises and syncopes whose attacks he felt by sympathy, it would have pierced your heart through and through.

CRISPIN : All three of us had a share in it.

LISETTE : At last Heaven had pity on our misery.

(Enter M. Scruple)

LISETTE: But I see somebody. (To Crispin): It is one of the notaries.

GERONTE: Good morning, Monsieur Scruple.

CRISPIN (*aside*): Ah! I am lost now!

GERONTE: You have been awaited a long time here.

M. SCRUPLE: I am indeed delighted, sir, that you are already enjoying better health in less than an hour. I knew that when you made your will you would soon feel a relief. The body is better when the mind is at perfect rest.

GERONTE: I feel it is so every day.

M. SCRUPLE: Here then is the paper which, in accordance with your instructions, I promised to return to your hands.

GERONTE: What paper, if you please? Why? For what purpose?

M. SCRUPLE: It is your will which you have just made.

GERONTE: I made my will!

M. SCRUPLE: Yes, without any doubt, sir.

LISETTE (*aside*): Crispin, my heart beats!

CRISPIN (*aside*): I shiver with fear.

GERONTE: Parbleu! Sir, you are dreaming. It was to make my will that I needed your professional services.

M. SCRUPLE: Sir, I am not dreaming in any respect. You dictated it to us in your full senses and reason. Have you so soon changed your mind? This gentleman and this lady were present. They can tell you what they saw.

ERASTE (*aside*): What can I say?

LISETTE (*aside*): Just Heaven!

CRISPIN (*aside*): I am confounded!

GERONTE: Was Eraste present?

M. SCRUPLE: Yes, sir, I can swear to it.

GERONTE: Is it true, nephew? I conjure you to speak.

ERASTE : Ah ! Do not speak to me of wills, uncle. It is tearing out my heart too tyrannically.

GERONTE : Lisette, you speak then.

LISETTE : Crispin, speak for me. I feel—in my throat—my voice obstructed.

CRISPIN (*to Geronte*) : I can satisfy you in the matter ; none knows better than I the truth of the affair.

GERONTE : I made my will ?

CRISPIN : It cannot be said that you were seen absolutely to write it just now, but I am very certain that in the place where you are now, a man, dressed almost exactly as you are, seated in the presence of two notaries, dictated his last wishes, word for word. I will not assert it was you. Why ? One may always be mistaken. But it was you—or me.

M. SCRUPLE (*to Geronte*) : Nothing could be truer, you may believe me.

GERONTE : My illness must have taken away my memory ; it is my trance.

CRISPIN : Yes, that's what it is.

LISETTE : Have no doubt of it. And, to prove the fact, do you not remember that you told me to go for the notary about a certain affair ?

GERONTE : Yes.

LISETTE : That he came into your room, immediately took his pen and ink-horn and that you dictated to him according to your fantasy ?

GERONTE : That I do not remember.

LISETTE : It's your trance.

CRISPIN : Do you remember very clearly, sir, that there came to you just now a certain Norman nephew and a certain baroness with a great noise and insolent airs, insulting you in your own home ?

GERONTE : Yes.

CRISPIN : And that to avenge yourself for this out-

rage, you promised me a place in your will or some pleasant little income during my life-time ?

GERONTE : That I do not remember.

CRISPIN : It's your trance.

GERONTE : I believe they are right and that my illness is real.

LISETTE : Do you not remember that M. Clistorel. . .

ERASTE : Why repeat this interrogatory ? Monsieur Geronte admits it all, his lapse of memory, the sending for the notary, the drawing up of the will.

GERONTE : It must be so, since everyone says so. But let me see what I have written down.

CRISPIN (*aside*) : Ah ! There's the devil of it !

M. SCRUPLE : It shall be read to you then :

" In the presence of us whose names are appended below Master Matthieu Geronte sitting in his armchair being in full possession of his senses as far as could be ascertained from the appearance and action he exhibited although sick in body sound of mind who after ripe reflection that all things here below are fragile and transitory. . . "

CRISPIN : Ah ! What heart of stone, what wicked spirit, would not cleave into quarters at hearing such words ?

LISETTE : Alas ! I cannot stifle my sobs.

GERONTE : My soul is touched to see them weep. There, there, comfort yourselves ; I am still alive.

M. SCRUPLE (*continuing to read*) :

" Considering that nothing remains in the same state and also desirous not to die intestate. . . "

CRISPIN : Intestate ! . . .

LISETTE : Intestate ! . . . The word pierces my soul.

M. SCRUPLE : Quiet your sobs a little, Madam.

" Considering that nothing remains in the same state and also desirous not to die intestate. . . "

CRISPIN : Intestate ! . . .

LISETTE: Intestate! . . .

M. SCRUPLE: Allow me to read, if you please! If you continue to weep I can say nothing!

"Has made dictated named and constituted in writing this his last will and testament in the following form."

GERONTE: If I remember one word of this preamble and title, may I be hanged.

LISETTE: It's your trance.

CRISPIN: Ah! I warrant you. What creatures we are! This confounds me!

M. SCRUPLE (*reading*): "First I desire that my debts be discharged."

GERONTE: I owe nothing.

M. SCRUPLE: This is the declaration you made: "I owe my wine merchant four hundred francs—he is a rogue who lives in the next tavern."

GERONTE: I owe four hundred francs! It's a piece of roguery.

CRISPIN: Excuse me, sir, it's your trance. I don't know exactly whether *you* owe them but he has asked *me* for them a thousand times.

GERONTE: He's a scoundrel who ought to be sent to the galleys.

CRISPIN: If they were all sent there no one would pity them.

M. SCRUPLE (*reading*): "I name my nephew Eraste unique and residuary legatee. . ."

ERASTE: Can it be? . . . Just Heaven!

M. SCRUPLE (*reading*): "Disinheriting in so far as it is necessary my relatives nieces nephews born and to be born and all my bastards to whom God grant grace if there should be any on the day of my death."

GERONTE: What? I have bastards?

CRISPIN (*to Geronte*): It's the legal phrase.

GERONTE: Yes, I desired to name Eraste my heir; and by that clause I can now see that I may well have dictated this will.

M. SCRUPLE (*reading*): "I give and bequeath in hard cash to Lisette. . ."

LISETTE: Ah! great Gods!

M. SCRUPLE (*reading*): "Who stood me in lieu of maidservant in order that she may be joined to Crispin in lawful wedlock two thousand crowns."

CRISPIN (*to Geronte*): Sir . . . in truth . . . for a little . . . no . . . never . . . for indeed . . . my mouth . . . when I think . . . I am suffocated with gratitude.

(*To Lisette*): Speak!

LISETTE (*embracing Geronte*): Ah! Sir! . . .

GERONTE: What's the meaning of this? I am not the author of these follies. Two thousand crowns in cash!

LISETTE: Why! Do you repent your pious work already, I ask you? A nubile girl, exposed to misfortune, who wishes to make an end in good odour, in all honour—will you refuse her this little favour?

GERONTE: What! Six thousand francs! Fifteen or twenty crowns, if you like.

LISETTE: Husbands are so run after these days, sir. What can one get, alas, for twenty crowns?

GERONTE: People have what they can get, do you understand, my friend? There are husbands at all prices. (*To the notary*): Go on, pray.

M. SCRUPLE: "Item. I give and bequeath. . ."

CRISPIN (*aside*): Ah! Now it is my turn. And I shall be thrown. . .

M. SCRUPLE: "To Crispin. . ."

(*Crispin hunches himself up*)

GERONTE (*looking at Crispin*): To Crispin!!

M. SCRUPLE (*reading*): "For the obliging good and loyal services which he has rendered my nephew in divers matters and may render him in the future. . ."

GERONTE : Where is this fine speech to end ? Come.

M. SCRUPLE (*reading*) : " An annuity of fifteen hundred francs to remember me in his prayers."

CRISPIN (*throwing himself at Geronte's feet*) : Yes, I promise it sir, on both knees, I will pray to God for you to my last sigh. Ah, that is what is meant by a really honest gentleman ! So generously to leave me such a sum !

GERONTE : No, I say, Parbleu ! What does all this mean. (*To the notary*) : I desire to be enlightened on the subject of these legacies.

M. SCRUPLE : What enlightenment can I give you ? I have only written down what you ordered me.

GERONTE : What ! Should I have bequeathed without any reason an annuity of fifteen hundred francs to a master-rogue whom Eraste would have dismissed if he had taken my advice ?

CRISPIN (*still on his knees*) : Don't repent a meritorious deed. Will you deny this generous effort and be a miser even after your death ?

GERONTE : Have my bank-notes been stolen from my pockets ? I tremble at the misfortune I feel approaching ; I dare not search myself.

ERASTE (*aside*) : What an unhappy embarrassment ! (*Aloud to Geronte*) : Just now by your express orders I took them to Isabelle's house for her.

GERONTE : By my order !

ERASTE : Yes, sir.

GERONTE : I don't remember it.

CRISPIN : It's your trance.

GERONTE : Oh ! Let me be satisfied about all this ! What knaveries ! I am weary of so many trances ! (*To Eraste*) : Run to her house ; tell her when I made that gift I had lost mind, sense and reason.

(*Enter Isabelle and Madam Argante*)

ISABELLE (*to Geronte*) : Do not be alarmed, I have come to restore them to you.

GERONTE : O Heaven !

ERASTE : But under conditions we are bold to advance.

GERONTE : And what are the conditions ?

ERASTE : I beg you humbly to approve the present will.

GERONTE : What are you thinking about ? Do you want me to leave this chamber-maid a legacy like that ?

LISETTE : Think of the good it will do you in Heaven ; the larger the legacy the greater the merit.

GERONTE (*to Crispin*) : And this rascal is to have a sum like that for his share !

CRISPIN : I promise you, sir, to make good use of it ; and besides, this legacy can do you no harm.

GERONTE : It is true he can only enjoy it after my death.

ERASTE : And that is not all. Look at this fair creature ; you know what a heart may feel for her, you have felt the force of her power yourself ; charmed with her attractions I embrace your knees and ask her from you as my wife.

GERONTE : Ah ! Master nephew. . .

ERASTE : I only allowed my desire to appear when your heart hearkened to a more healthy feeling and changed its plan.

MME ARGANTE : I think you and I could not do better.

GERONTE : We will see ; but before concluding this affair I want to see my notes intact.

ISABELLE : Here they are ; as I received them, so I return them.

(She offers the pocket-book to Geronte)

LISETTE (*taking the pocket-book before Geronte*) : Stay a moment ! Let us agree about matters before giving up anything.

GERONTE : If you don't give it up I will have you all hanged.

ERASTE (*throwing himself on his knees*) : Sir, you see me clasp your knees. Will you throw us all into despair to-day ?

LISETTE (*on her knees*) : Ah ! Sir !

CRISPIN (*on his knees*) : Ah ! Sir !

GERONTE : I am assailed by tenderness. Tell me, has nothing been taken from my pocket-book ?

ISABELLE : No, sir, I swear it. It is intact and you will find everything down to the smallest paper.

GERONTE : Well, if that is so, in the presence of the notary I consent to do anything to have my bank-notes ; I ratify the present will in all respects and give my full consent to your marriage. My bank-notes ?

LISETTE : Here they are.

ERASTE (*to Geronte*) : What thanks. . .

GERONTE : Let me dispense with your thanks. Marry each other : it is a good deed and I consent to it ; but above all procreate children as quickly as you can to inherit in a direct line from you ; the whole spawn of collaterals is malignant. Detest all lower Normandy nephews for ever and nieces brought here from Maine by the devil, more dangerous scourges, more disastrous animals than plague and war ever were.

(*Mme. Argante, Isabelle, Eraste, and Geronte go out*)

CRISPIN : Leave him in his error ; we are heirs. Lisette, come and bind the laurel on my brow ; but plant nothing else there after our marriage.

LISETTE : I have enough now to remain honest.

CRISPIN (*to the audience*) :

Now, gentlemen, I've brought my barque to haven
And fetched a dead man from the gates of Heaven,
As I desired, I named a legacy
Of fifteen hundred francs annuity ;
I gain a spouse ; in short my life's all honey ;
But clap our play, or I renounce the money.

END OF ACT V



ALAIN RENE LESAGE. [Face p. 102.
Engraved by Aug. St. Aubin.



ALAIN RENÉ LESAGE

I

The few known facts and apocryphal anecdotes about Lesage have been repeated in much the same words and order by generations of commentators ; one can do little more than repeat them again. The great picaresque novelist, who piloted his heroes through such innumerable adventures, had none himself ; the chronicler of infinite rogueries was an honest, one might almost say a godly, *bourgeois*. A good husband and father, an honest man and yet an author of genius—that might be his epitaph.

Lesage came from a legal family. His father, Claude Lesage, was a "notaire royal," who married in 1665 Jeanne Brenugat. Their son, Alain René was born on the 8th May (others say the 13th December) 1668 at Sarzeau (Morbihan). At the age of nine the child's mother died ; at fourteen his father. The trustees of the estate were two uncles who lost or embezzled it. Thus Lesage who had been educated by the Jesuits at Vannes, came to Paris to study law as a poor student at the age of twenty-two. The brothers Parfaict say that about this time Lesage formed a *liaison* with a woman of quality, who shared with him "her heart and her restricted fortune." In any case this irregular alliance did not last long, for in 1694 Lesage married Marie Elizabeth Huyard of Paris, by whom he had several children and whom he loved tenderly all his life.

Since Lesage is described as "avocat" in the birth certificate of his eldest son it has been presumed that he practised law; at the same time quite well supported conjectures are advanced that he held a small revenue post in the provinces. It is certain that he looked to literature for at least part of the income for his growing family. As a law student he had been friendly with another student named Dauchet, whose influence is thought to have contributed towards the literary ambitions of the future author of *Gil Blas*. Lesage's early publications were hesitating, subaltern and unsuccessful. In 1695 he published a translation of the *Epistles* of the Sophist, Aristaenetus. This work appears to have attracted no attention from the public, but secured the young author an annual pension of 600 livres from the Abbé de Lyonne, which was regularly paid until the Abbé's death in 1715. The influence of this Abbé turned Lesage towards the study of Spanish literature, so important a factor in his literary career. In 1700 he published translations of two Spanish comedies, one by Francisco de Rojas, the other by Lope de Vega. In 1702, an adaptation of another comedy by Francisco de Rojas was played by the Comédie Française and was so little liked it had only two performances. Two years later he made an adaptation of the false *Second Part of Don Quixote*, whose publication so annoyed Cervantes. Now, although Lesage had undoubted dramatic talents, his genius as a picaresque novelist far overshadowed them, and this early book is of interest chiefly as showing his first attempts at a form he subsequently mastered. The adaptation was not unsuccessful; it went into four editions during Lesage's lifetime. Still translating, but with less and less fidelity and more improvisation, Lesage returned to the stage on the 15th March, 1707 with an adaptation of a play by Calderon, *Don César Ursin*, which was a failure.

But the same year saw Lesage score two considerable successes with works of his own. *Don César Ursin* was accompanied by a one act play which was received as favourable as the longer work was hissed; this was *Crispin Rival de son Maître*, which for so many years "held the boards," a bustling little comedy of intrigue, where a knavish valet personates his master and tries to marry his master's fiancée. Still in the same year came *Le Diable Boiteux*, so often translated into English under the title of *The Devil on Two Sticks*, which in popularity and general esteem comes next only to *Gil Blas* and *Turcaret*. *Le Diable Boiteux* began as a translation of a work with a similar title by Guevara, but almost at once leaves its Spanish original and becomes a sort of picaresque development of the "caractères" of La Bruyère.

The success of *Crispin* encouraged Lesage to submit more plays to the Comédie Française. A comedy in one act, *La Tontine*, an amusing little skit on the "tontine" form of life assurance, was played in 1732. Another one-act play, *Les Etrennes*, was refused; luckily, as it turned out, because Lesage took the manuscript back and turned it into *Turcaret*, undoubtedly his finest play, considered by most modern critics as the best comedy of its age. Two anecdotes about *Turcaret* must be repeated because, although they are doubtful, they have the importance of showing what kind of a reputation Lesage had acquired in the world. It is said that the wealthy corporation of financiers satirised in "Turcaret" offered Lesage a large sum of money—70,000 or 100,000 livres—to withdraw the play. He refused. At a distance that looks the only fit and proper thing to do. But try to imagine how very tempting the offer must have been to a man in Lesage's position. In 1708 and 9, France was in a miserable state; defeated annually by Marlborough and Eugene in the field, hopelessly inferior at sea except for privateering, even more hopelessly bankrupt at home.

The sufferings of the mass of the nation in their poverty and disorder were terrible, and they were increased by the vile winter of 1708-9, when hundreds of people died of hunger and cold. Lesage was a poor man of letters with heavy responsibilities. He had only to drop the manuscript of *Turcaret* in the fire (preserving secretly a copy to be printed after his death) and he was comfortable for the rest of his life. It is easy enough to say : " Of course he had to refuse " ; not all those who say it would do it, if they found themselves in Lesage's position.

So much for his honesty and incorruptibility. Now for his independence. A Duchess had asked him to read *Turcaret* to her guests ; Lesage arrived late and was greeted with the remark that he had made the company waste an hour's time. " Then I will save them two hours, Madam "—and Lesage put his manuscript back in his pocket, marched off, and refused to return in spite of the flattering mob sent to bring him back.

Lesage was certainly strict in preserving his dignity and independence. He next broke with the actors of the Comédie Française—and in 1709 there was no Comédie Italienne as a rival and refuge for discontented dramatists. The details of this affair are rather obscure. It appears that the wealthy people who had failed to bribe Lesage to suppress *Turcaret* succeeded in bribing the actors. At all events Lesage found it impossible to continue writing for the Comédie Française, and, characteristically, went off to write for the players at the Fairs. From our point of view this was unfortunate. The fifty or so pieces he wrote for the Fairs could not fail to have verve and wit, but the handicap of the form was too strong even for Lesage. One cannot read more than a few of these embryonic vaudevilles without boredom. Had Lesage continued to write comedies in the vein of *Turcaret*, he would undoubtedly be the one great comic dramatist between Molière and Beaumarchais. As things are, we

have simply a specimen of what he might have done, and four volumes of scrappy "pièces de la Foire."

The modern reputation of Lesage rests chiefly upon his achievement as a novelist, though the reader, it is hoped, will find *Turcaret* not altogether unworthy of a great writer. *Gil Blas* holds an important place in the early history of the novel and is still read for pleasure by people who are in no sense literary students. It owes this long popularity to Lesage's gift for inventing a variety of incidents, to his accurate and amusing character drawing, and to his light, rapid style. Psychological subtlety it has little, but exciting adventures abound in it. Who can forget youthful thrills with *Gil Blas* in the robbers' den, the positive agony of his unsuccessful effort to escape and the trepidation and final delight when he at last gets free with the beautiful lady? It is rare fun and it has been found so by generations of readers. Fielding and Smollet both owe much to *Gil Blas*, just as the more tedious Richardson is indebted to Marivaux's *Marianne*. Scott, of course, adored *Gil Blas* and has written by far the best essay on it ever published in England.

As evidence of the popularity of *Le Diable Boiteux*, the story is told that Boileau was enraged to find his young lackey so absorbed in a tattered copy that he failed to hear his master's orders. But this was nothing to the popularity of *Gil Blas*. It was the chief work of his life. The first volumes appeared in 1715 the third in 1724 the last not until 1735. He wrote in the garden of his little house in the quartier Saint Jacques where Spence found him on a visit to Paris. The "pièces de la Foire" were the pot-boilers which kept the little establishment going, while Lesage planned and wrote his masterpiece at leisure. Here he remained for many years in his quiet independent life of literary labour avoiding the coteries and salons he detested and taking very much his own private road to immortality. His morals and behaviour seem to have

been irreproachable. He lacked both the disordered temperament of the lyricist and the perplexed inner life of the tragic writer. He did not wrestle with principalities and with powers but with flesh and blood, and if he denounced spiritual wickedness in high places it was from the sure level ground of a good contented *bourgeois*. He was one of that vast army of people for whom the tragic passions and spiritual contests of Elizabethan drama do not exist ; we have no record that he had ever heard of Webster, but had he read his plays, he too might have thought the creator of *The Duchess of Malji* and *The White Devil* an old fool.

Lesage had a great affection for his children. One of them distressed him by becoming an actor ; but an artful friend effected a reconciliation by inducing Lesage to witness a performance of *Turcaret* in which his son took the part of the Marquess. When this son died in 1743 Lesage was broken-hearted and in the words of the Abbé Voisenon : " Too old to work, too proud to beg, too honest to borrow," he had no resource for his old age but to retire to Boulogne where one of his sons was a canon. He died on the 7th November, 1747, aged eighty, and his funeral was attended by the governor of the province and his staff. For the last forty years of his life, Lesage was deaf, which was of great assistance to him in avoiding the conversation of fools ; he had only to put his ear-trumpet in his pocket and he was safe. His conversation was gay and witty ; the Comte de Tressan who saw him in extreme old age at Boulogne found him still able to converse intelligently " when the sun was highest," but towards evening the old man grew doting and a bore. Lesage had become somewhat forgotten in his old age ; with his death his work again attracted attention and has preserved its reputation through many mutations of taste.

II

The principal character in *Turcaret* is a type of the eternal profiteer, the upstart, enriched by more or less dishonest means, whose wealth is his only merit. But M. Turcaret is also a particular and very odious sort of profiteer who was the product partly of the clumsy fiscal system of the 17th century, partly of the social disintegration which began in the last years of Louis XIV and partly of the military disasters of the war with England and Austria. M. Turcaret is a "traitant," a "partisan." I shall not weary the reader with a discourse on tax collecting;¹ it is enough to say that the French monarchy farmed its taxes out to sets of financiers, who formed themselves into corporations to exploit their country. This system was disastrous. It meant that the King received perhaps only one half of the money actually paid in taxes; it meant that he was perpetually in debt and under the necessity of borrowing or making bad bargains with the "partisans"; it meant that the taxes were collected brutally and ruthlessly; and it meant that nearly all the wealth of France was gathered into the hands of a set of unscrupulous and unpatriotic financiers. In those oppressive, lean years of war, France starved, while the "partisans" lived in the extreme of luxury. The people hated them, but the King, Louis XIV. himself, was impotent against them. In 1707 all the revenue up to 1715 had been mortgaged; there were 800 millions of current expense and 20 millions to meet it with. No wonder the King was gracious to Samuel Bernard, the banker, while the Duc de Saint-Simon in the background raged at "this prostitution of the King." There was no help for it and the monarchy "descended the Niagara of bankruptcy" until the final

¹ Mr. A. Hamilton Thompson explains the whole system very clearly in his edition of the text of *Turcaret*. (Cambridge, 1918).

crash in 1789, when the royal family of France, its noble families, all that was best in the country, paid the price for the century-long extortions of rich lackeys and cashiers. Not that the aristocracy was blameless—the Knight, the Marquess, the Baroness in “*Turcaret*” are true enough type-portraits of the demoralisation and frivolous vice which were rotting the French aristocrats in the last years of Louis XIV. The splendours of this great reign still masked the decay, but with the death of Louis XIV. the façade fell and showed the hideous and futile baseness which had covered Versailles like a fungus. Well might Bourdaloue and Masillon roll forensic thunders from their pulpits ; well might the Duc de Saint-Simon rage at the “bastards” and the “noirceur” of M. de Maine and console himself for the spectacle at the feet of Rancé in the cold solitude of La Trappe. And well might Lesage compose his bitter *Turcaret*, a comedy in which all the characters are rascals and all but two mutually duped, where there is not a sign of honesty, generosity, decent feeling, where all is greed, vanity, self-interest, ostentatious extravagance on one side, impudent exploitation on the other. The efforts of the “partisans” to suppress the play, Lesage’s determination to produce it, the attempt of the “partisans” to make it a failure by packing the theatre, the play’s success and then its abrupt withdrawal, probably because the actors had been bribed—all take on significance when we understand how the better part of the aristocracy and bourgeois and the people hated the “partisans” and those aristocrats who resembled them by their vulgarity and vice.

Turcaret is a specimen of that kind of comedy whose main features are *terre-à-terre* realism, photographic character-studies, a satirical and almost didactic purpose. French commentators call *Turcaret* a “comedy of intrigue” and talk about “Spanish influence.” A comedy of intrigue, yes ; but there is not a flash of imagination, not

a glimpse of heroism in the whole play. It is arid, worldly, French. This, strangely enough, is the very type of play which has triumphed over the fresher, sweeter and altogether more interesting romantic comedy of the Elizabethans. Its position as a predecessor of 19th century "plays with a purpose" is unmistakable. Here is neither the farcical gaiety of Regnard, the delicate analysis of sentiment of Marivaux, not the solemn preaching of Destouches. *Turcaret* is the predecessor of the plays of Scribe and Dumas *fils* and hence of the tedious English imitations of them which still usurp the stage.

The objection that *Turcaret* is too long is never met with in French writers, but seems a strong one, while of course the absurdity of forcing so much intrigue and action into the "unities" is palpable. Lesage had a dramatic sense but not the feeling for dramatic brevity. *Turcaret* reads like a good satirical novel in dialogue. The introductory scene is rather clumsy, but with the entry of Frontin and the Baroness's acceptance of the Knight's letter the interest begins and hardly ever fails. The introduction of M. Turcaret with his bad, ridiculously bad, verses and his bill for ten thousand crowns gives the cue to that gentleman's character at once. Notice the continual double meaning given to her words by the Baroness, always fatuously interpreted in the sense flattering to himself by the ex-lackey. The Knight, who is bleeding the Baroness at fast as she bleeds Turcaret, is an interesting creation, but Frontin, who is eventually to supersede M. Turcaret, is the cleverest scoundrel of them all. To follow the play through all its intrigue and rapid change of interest would be tedious. The reader will note how clear-cut the characters are; there is none of Destouches's sloppy conventionalised work here. Even Marine and Lisette are individuals, while the Marquess is one of the great creations of French comedy, perhaps the finest

dramatic portrait of the *petit-maitre* we have. "Ordinarily," the Knight remarks to him, "you sleep all day and drink all night." But Turcaret is the centre and clue to all this mass of shady intrigue. His crass vulgarity, his ostentatious scattering of money, his complete lack of scruple, his fatuity, his heartlessness towards inferiors and his sentimental itch for the titled whore who gulls him, the blatant assurance and self-confidence which are his downfall, his treatment of his wife and sister, his breaking the dishes in a rage, his being "soothed by a tune on a trumpet"; these and a score of similar traits sketch a lively portrait of the "eternal profiteer." For the rest, the play may be described in Frontin's words as "the most diverting chain of knaveries imaginable." In the end everyone is duped, except Frontin, who has successfully embezzled the money and exults over the fall of Turcaret. We are left wondering how long it will be before Lisette avenges M. Turcaret by duping Frontin.

TURCARET: OR THE FINANCIER

Comedy in Five Acts

BY ALAIN RENÉ LESAGE

First performed in 1709

PERSONS

M. TURCARET	a financier, ¹ in love with the Baroness
MME TURCARET	his wife
A KNIGHT	} coxcombs
A MARQUESS	
THE BARONESS	a young widow and a coquette
M. GRAB	a usurer
M. FERRET	a rogue
MME JACOB	a dealer in toilette necessities, and sister to M. Turcaret
FRONTIN	the Knight's valet
FLAMAND	Turcaret's valet
JASMIN	page to the Baroness
MARINE	} maid servants to the Baroness
LISETTE	

SCENE : The Baroness's house in Paris

¹ M. Turcaret is a revenue-farmer, and hence from the money pillaged from the tax-payers is able to set up as a financier.

TURCARET

ACT I

(The Baroness and Marine)

MARINE : Two hundred pistoles again yesterday !

BARONESS : Cease upbraiding me. . .

MARINE : No, Madam, I cannot be silent ; your behaviour is unendurable.

BARONESS : Marine ! . . .

MARINE : You exhaust my patience.

BARONESS : Well ! What do you expect me to do ? Am I a woman to hoard up money ?

MARINE : That would be asking too much of you ; and yet I see you compelled to do so.

BARONESS : Why ?

MARINE : You are the widow of a foreign colonel killed in Flanders last year ; you have already spent the small dower he left you when he went away, and you had nothing left but your furniture which you would have been obliged to sell if Fortune had not permitted you to make a conquest, of M. Turcaret, the financier. Is this not true, Madam ?

BARONESS : I don't deny it.

MARINE : Well, this M. Turcaret who is not a very lovable man and whom you do not love although you have decided to marry him as he has promised you marriage ; M. Turcaret, I say, is in no hurry to keep his word to you and you wait patiently for him to carry out

his promise because every day he makes you some valuable present ; I have nothing to say against that ; but what I cannot endure is that you should have saddled yourself with a little gambling Knight who will gamble away the spoils of the financier. Eh ! What do you propose to do with the Knight ?

BARONESS : Keep him as a friend. Is one not allowed to have friends ?

MARINE : Of course, and especially friends who can be used as a last resource. For example, this one might very well marry you in case M. Turcaret fails you ; he is not one of these Knights who are vowed to celibacy and forced to run off to the help of Malta ; he is a Parisian Knight ; he fights his campaigns at lansquenet.¹

BARONESS : Oh ! I think him a very fine gentleman.

MARINE : I judge him very differently. With his impassioned air, his sugary tones, his smirking face, he seems to me a positive comedian ; and what confirms me in this opinion is that Frontin, his good valet Frontin, says nothing to me against him.

BARONESS : Wonderful evidence ! And from that you conclude ? . . .

MARINE : That the master and the valet are two rogues in league to dupe you ; and you allow yourself to be deceived by their tricks, although you have known them for some time. It is true that he was the first during your widowhood to offer you his hand point-blank ; and this appearance of fidelity has so set him up in your good graces that he uses your purse as if it were his own.

BARONESS : It is true I was touched by the Knight's first attentions. I confess I ought to have tested him before showing him my sentiments and I admit frankly

¹ . . . " il fait ses caravanes dans les lansquenets " ; a double pun : " faire caravane " means (1) to make a cruise with the Knights of Malta against the Turks ; (2) to lead a dissipated life ; " les lansquenets " are (1) German foot-soldiers ; (2) a game of cards.

that you are perhaps right to upbraid me with all I have done for him.

MARINE : Assuredly ; and I shall not cease worrying you until you have driven him from the house ; for, if this goes on, do you know what will happen ?

BARONESS : What ?

MARINE : M. Turcaret will find out that you want to keep the Knight as a friend, and *he* will not think it permissible for you to keep friends. He will cease to make you presents ; he will not marry you ; and if you are reduced to marrying the Knight it will be a very bad marriage for both of you.

BARONESS : Your reflections are judicious, Marine ; I must think how to make use of them.

MARINE : You will do well to ; the future must be foreseen. From this time on keep in mind a solid establishment ; profit by M. Turcaret's prodigalities, while you wait for him to marry you. If he fails to do so, there will indeed be a little talking in the world ; but to make up for it you will have good furniture, ready money, jewels, good bank-notes and shares ; and then you will find some capricious or needy gentleman who will restore your reputation by a good marriage.

BARONESS : I yield to your reasons, Marine ; I will shake myself free of the Knight with whom I feel certain I shall ruin myself in the end.

MARINE : You are beginning to listen to reason. That is the right course. You must attach yourself to M. Turcaret, to marry or to ruin him. You will snatch from the wreck of his fortune at least enough to set up a coach and to support a brilliant figure in the world ; and, whatever they may say, you will tire out the chatterers, weary gossip, and gradually they will grow accustomed to ranking you with the women of quality.

BARONESS : My resolution is taken : I will banish the Knight from my heart ; it is done, I take no further

interest in his fate, I shall not again make up his losses ; he will receive nothing more from me.

MARINE : His valet is coming ; greet him icily ; begin at once the great work you meditate.

BARONESS : Let me act for myself.

(Enter Frontin)

FRONTIN *(to the Baroness)* : I come on behalf of my master and myself, Madam, to wish you good-morning.

BARONESS *(coldly)* : I am obliged to you, Frontin.

FRONTIN : And will Mademoiselle Marine allow me the liberty of saluting her also ?

MARINE *(brusquely)* : Good day and good year.

FRONTIN *(presenting the Baroness a letter)* : This letter, written to you by the Knight, will inform you, Madam, of a certain adventure. . .

MARINE *(aside to the Baroness)* : Don't take it.

BARONESS *(taking the letter)* : It binds me to nothing, Marine. Let me see what he sends me.

MARINE *(aside to the Baroness)* : Silly curiosity !

BARONESS *(reads)* : " I have received the portrait of a countess ; I send it and sacrifice it to you ; but you need not give me any credit for this sacrifice, my dear Baroness ; I am so preoccupied, so possessed by your charms, that I have not the power to be unfaithful to you. Pardon, adorable one, if I say nothing more ; my mind is mortally depressed. I have lost all my money. Frontin will tell you the rest.

The Knight."

MARINE : Since he has lost all his money I don't see what rest there is.

FRONTIN : Pardon me. Besides the two hundred pistoles Madam was kind enough to lend him yesterday

and the little money he had as well, he has lost another thousand crowns on his word ; that is the rest. The devil ! There's not an unnecessary word in my master's letters.

BARONESS (*to Frontin*) : Where is the portrait ?

FRONTIN (*giving the portrait to the Baroness*) : Here it is.

BARONESS : He has never spoken to me of this countess, Frontin.

FRONTIN : She is a conquest, Madam, we made unexpectedly. We met this countess the other day at Lansquenet.

MARINE : The Countess of Lansquenet !

FRONTIN : She ogled my master ; he responded to her simperings in jest. She, who is serious, took the matter very seriously ; this morning she sent us this portrait ; we don't even know her name.

MARINE : I wager this countess is some Norman lady. All her bourgeois family club together to send her a small income to Paris, which the chances of gambling increase or diminish.

FRONTIN (*to Marine*) : That is what we don't know.

MARINE : Ah, no ! You don't know it ! Peste ! You are not ones to make foolish sacrifices ! You know too well what they cost !

FRONTIN (*to the Baroness*) : Do you know, Madam, that this last night was nearly an eternal one for my master ? When he came home he threw himself into an armchair ; he began by recollecting his most unlucky feats in gambling, seasoning his thoughts with epithets and fierce exclamations.

BARONESS (*looking at the portrait*) : Have you seen this fair countess, Frontin ? Is she not more beautiful than her portrait ?

FRONTIN : No, Madam, and as you see, she is not a regular beauty ; but she is very piquant, faith, very piquant. Well, I tried at first to point out to my master that his oaths were words wasted ; but, remembering that

they relieve a desperate gambler, I allowed him to enjoy himself with his exclamations.

BARONESS (*still looking at the portrait*) : How old is she, Frontin ?

FRONTIN : That I don't know exactly ; for, her complexion is so fine, I might be out twenty years.

MARINE : That means she is at least fifty.

FRONTIN : I could well believe it, for she looks thirty. My master, then, after having reflected, abandoned himself to his rage ; he called for his pistols.

BARONESS : His pistols, Marine, his pistols !

MARINE : He won't kill himself, Madam, he won't kill himself.

FRONTIN : I refused them ; he immediately drew his sword.

BARONESS : Ah ! He is certainly wounded, Marine.

MARINE : Hey ! No, no ; Frontin will have prevented him.

FRONTIN : Yes, I threw myself upon him furiously : " Sir," I exclaimed, " what are you about to do ? You overpass the limits of a lansquenet grief. If your ill luck makes you hate the light of day, at least preserve yourself, live for your amiable Baroness ; hitherto she has generously extricated you from your embarrassments ; and be certain " (I added, simply to calm his fury) " that she will not leave you in this one."

MARINE (*aside*) : He understands her, the scoundrel !

FRONTIN : " It is only a matter of a thousand crowns for once ; M. Turcaret has a broad back ; he can easily bear this extra weight."

BARONESS : Well, Frontin ?

FRONTIN : Well, Madam, at these words, (observe the power of hope) he allowed himself to be disarmed like a child ; he went to bed and to sleep.

MARINE : Ah ! poor Knight!

FRONTIN : But this morning when he awoke he felt his

grief revive; the portrait of the countess failed to dissipate it. He made me leave at once to come here and he awaits my return to decide his fate. What shall I tell him, Madam?

BARONESS: Tell him, Frontin, that he can always rely on me¹ and that, as I have no ready money . . . (*She begins to pull off her diamond*).

MARINE (*preventing her*): Hey! Madam, what are you thinking of?

BARONESS (*returning her diamond*): Tell him that I am touched by his misfortune.

MARINE (*to Frontin*): And that for my part I am very distressed by his bad luck.

FRONTIN: Ah! How distressed he will be! . . . (*Aside*): Devil take the baggage!

BARONESS: Tell him, Frontin, that I am sensible of his grief.

MARINE: That I feel his affliction keenly, Frontin.

FRONTIN: It is all over then, Madam; you will never see the Knight again. The shame of not being able to pay his debts will separate him from you for ever; for nothing is more felt by a young man of good family. We shall take post immediately.

BARONESS: Take post, Marine!

MARINE (*to the Baroness*): They haven't the money to pay for it.

FRONTIN: Farewell, Madam.

BARONESS (*pulling off her diamond*): Wait, Frontin.

MARINE (*to Frontin*): No, no, go and give him his answer quickly.

BARONESS (*to Marine*): Oh! I cannot make up my mind to abandon him. (*Giving her diamond to Frontin*): There, that is a diamond worth five hundred pistoles given me by M. Turcaret; go and pawn it and rescue your master from the terrible situation he is in.

¹ "Faire fonds sur moi": (1) "Rely on me"; (2) "Make money out of me."

FRONTIN : I shall recall him to life. I shall inform him, Marine, of the excess of your affliction.

(Goes)

MARINE : Ah ! How well you two rascals work together.

BARONESS : You are going to rage at me, Marine, to fly into a temper. . .

MARINE : No, Madam, I shall not give myself that trouble, I assure you. Eh ! After all, what does it matter to me if your money goes off as lightly as it came. It is your affair, Madam, your affair.

BARONESS : Alas ! I am more to be pitied than blamed ; what you see me do is not the result of my own free will ; I am carried away by so tender a regard, I cannot resist it.

MARINE : A tender regard ! Are such weaknesses for you ? Fie ! fie ! you love like an old tradesman's wife.

BARONESS : How unjust you are, Marine ! Could I be ungrateful to the Knight for the sacrifice he has made me ?

MARINE : A wonderful sacrifice ! How easy it is to deceive you ! 'Sdeath ! That's some old family portrait ; who knows ? His grandmother perhaps.

BARONESS (*looking at the portrait*) : No ; I have some recollection of that portrait, and a recent recollection.

MARINE (*taking the portrait*) : Wait. . . Ah ! precisely, it is that female colossus from the country we saw at the ball three days ago, who made such a fuss before she would take off her mask and who was unknown to everybody when she did unmask.

BARONESS : You are right, Marine ; the countess is not badly shaped.

MARINE (*returning the portrait to the Baroness*) : Almost like M. Turcaret. But if the countess were a woman with

money, she would not be sacrificed to you, take my word.

(*Enter Flamand*)

BARONESS : Hush, Marine ; I see M. Turcaret's valet.

MARINE (*aside to the Baroness*) : Oh ! Let him come ; he brings us only good news. He is holding something ; no doubt it is a new present sent to you by his master.

FLAMAND (*presenting the Baroness with a little coffer*) : Madam, M. Turcaret begs you to accept this little present. Servant, Marine.

MARINE : You are welcome, Flamand ! I would much rather see you than that ugly Frontin.

BARONESS (*showing the coffer to Marine*) : Look, Marine, see how finely this little coffer is worked ; did you ever see anything more delicate ?

MARINE : Open it, open it, I reserve my admiration for the inside ; my heart tells me we shall find it more charming than the outside.

BARONESS (*opens it*) : What do I see ? A note to bearer ! ¹ A serious matter.

MARINE : For how much, Madam ?

BARONESS : Ten thousand crowns.

MARINE (*aside*) : Good ! The mistake of the diamond is atoned for.

BARONESS : I see another note.

MARINE : To bearer as well ?

BARONESS : No ; they are verses addressed to me by M. Turcaret.

MARINE : Verses by M. Turcaret !

BARONESS (*reading*) : " To Phyllis. . . Quatrain. . . "
I am Phyllis and he begs me to accept his note in prose.

¹ " Billet au Porteur "—a bill of exchange payable to bearer. I have called it a " note " to avoid the possible ambiguity of " bill " and the clumsiness of a longer though more accurate phrase.

MARINE: I am very anxious to hear the verse of an author who sends such good prose.

BARONESS: Here it is; listen. (*Reads*):

“ Charming Phyllis, take this note
And be certain that my soul
Will for ever towards yours roll
As sure as four pence make a groat.”

MARINE: How finely that is imagined!

BARONESS: And nobly expressed! Authors paint themselves in their works. . . Take this coffer to my closet, Marine.

(*Marine goes*)

BARONESS: I must give you something, Flamand. I want you to drink my health.

FLAMAND: I shall not fail to, Madam, and in good liquor too.

BARONESS: I urge it.

FLAMAND: When I was with the counsellor I used to serve I put up with anything; but since I have been with M. Turcaret, I have grown delicate in my tastes.

BARONESS: Nothing perfects the taste like the house of a financier.

(*Enter Marine*)

FLAMAND (*noticing M. Turcaret*): Here he is, Madam, here he is.

(*Goes, as M. Turcaret enters*)

BARONESS: I am delighted to see you, M. Turcaret, to offer you my congratulations on the verses you have sent me.

M. TURCARET (*laughing*): Ho! Ho!

BARONESS: Do you know they are most purely gallant! Voiture and Pavillon¹ never made anything like them.

¹ Poets very well-known for their delicate compliments in verse.

M. TURCARET : You must be joking.

BARONESS : Not at all.

M. TURCARET : But seriously Madam, you think they are well turned ?

BARONESS : Most wittily.

M. TURCARET : Yet they are the first verses I ever made in my life.

BARONESS : One would not say so.¹

M. TURCARET : I did not want to borrow the aid of some author, as is done so often.

BARONESS : It is obvious ; professional authors do not think and express themselves in that way ; they could not be suspected of having made them.

M. TURCARET : I wanted to see from curiosity if I could compose them and love opened my wit.

BARONESS : You are capable of anything, sir, nothing is impossible to you.

MARINE : Your prose deserves congratulations as well, sir ; it is as valuable as your poetry at least.

M. TURCARET : It is true my prose has its merits ; it is signed and approved by four revenue-farmers.

MARINE (*to M. Turcaret*) : Their approbation is worth more than the Academy's.

BARONESS : For my part I do not approve of your prose, sir, and I should like to quarrel with you.

M. TURCARET : And for what reason ?

BARONESS : Have you lost your reason, to send me a note to bearer ? You commit some such folly every day.

M. TURCARET : You are jesting.

BARONESS : How much is this note ? I did not look at the amount, I was so angry with you.

M. TURCARET : Good ! Only ten thousand crowns.

BARONESS : What ! Ten thousand crowns ! Ah ! If I had known that I should have sent it back at once.

M. TURCARET : Pooh ! Pooh !

BARONESS : But I shall send it back to you.

M. TURCARET: Oh! you have received it, you will not return it.

MARINE (*aside*): Oh! For that matter, no.

BARONESS: I am more offended by the motive than by the thing itself.

M. TURCARET: Hey! Why?

BARONESS: By overwhelming me every day with presents, it appears that you imagine these bonds are necessary to hold me to you.

M. TURCARET: What a thought! No, Madam, it is not with that purpose I. . .

BARONESS: But you are wrong, sir; they do not make me love you any the more.

M. TURCARET: How frank she is! How sincere!

BARONESS: I am only moved by your attentions, by your regard.

M. TURCARET: What a good heart!

BARONESS: By the sole pleasure of seeing you.

M. TURCARET: She charms me. . . Farewell, charming Phyllis.

BARONESS: What! Must you go so soon!

M. TURCARET: Yes, my queen; I only came in here to salute you as I was passing. I am going to one of our assemblies to oppose the admittance of a low fellow, a man of straw, whom they are trying to foist into our corporation. I shall return as soon as I can escape. (*Kisses her hand.*)

BARONESS: I wish you were back already.

MARINE (*curtseying to M. Turcaret*): Farewell, sir; I am your most humble servant.

M. TURCARET: Now I think of it, Marine, it is a long time since I gave you anything. (*Gives her a handful of money*): Ah, I give without counting.

MARINE: And I receive in the same way, sir. Oh! we are both people of good faith.

(*M. Turcaret goes*)

BARONESS : He departs very well satisfied with us, Marine.

MARINE : And we remain very pleased with him, Madam. Excellent man ! He has money, he is prodigal and credulous—a man made for coquettes.

BARONESS : As you see, I do much as I please with him.

MARINE : Yes, but unhappily here come some people who avenge M. Turcaret only too well.

(Enter the Knight and Frontin)

KNIGHT *(to Baroness)* : I have come, Madam, to express my gratitude to you ; but for you I should have broken gambler's faith ; my word would have lost all credit and I should have become the scorn of gentlemen.

BARONESS : I am glad to have done you this pleasure, sir.

KNIGHT : Ah ! How delightful it is to see one's honour saved by the object of one's love !

MARINE *(aside)* : How tender and passionate he is ! How can he be refused anything ?

KNIGHT : Good morning, Marine. Madam, I have to thank her too ; Frontin told me how interested she was in my misfortune.

MARINE *(to Knight)* : Ah ! Yes ! thanks as long as I live ! I did take an interest in it ; it costs us enough.

BARONESS *(to Marine)* : Be quiet, Marine ; some of your sallies do not please me.

KNIGHT : Eh ! Madam, let her speak ; I like people who are frank and sincere.

MARINE : And I hate people who are not.

KNIGHT : She is very witty in her bad tempers ; she has a brilliant repartee which delights me. Marine, I at least have for you what is called a true friendship, and I must give you a proof of it. *(He pretends to search in his*

pockets) : Frontin, the first time I win some money, remind me of it.

FRONTIN (*to Marine*) : It is as good as cash.

MARINE (*to Frontin*) : What do I want with his money ? Eh ! Let him cease coming here to pillage ours.

BARONESS : Take care what you are saying, Marine.

MARINE : It's highway robbery.

BARONESS : You are losing all respect !

KNIGHT (*to Baroness*) : Do not take the matter seriously.

MARINE : I cannot restrain myself, Madam ; I cannot calmly see you this gentleman's dupe, while M. Turcaret is yours.

BARONESS : Marine !

MARINE : Ah ! Fie ! Madam, it is ridiculous to receive with one hand and scatter with the other. Wonderful conduct ! We shall have all the shame and the Knight all the profit.

BARONESS : Oh ! You are really too insolent ; I cannot endure it any longer.

MARINE : Nor I.

BARONESS : I shall dismiss you.

MARINE : You shall not have that trouble, Madam ; I shall dismiss myself ; I will not have it said that I was fruitlessly an accomplice in the ruin of a financier.

BARONESS : Impudent ! Leave this room and don't return except to render me your accounts.

MARINE : I shall render them to M. Turcaret, Madams ; and if he is wise enough to believe me, you will go over them together.

(Goes)

KNIGHT : There is an impertinent creature, I must admit ; you were right to dismiss her.

FRONTIN : Yes, Madam, you are right ; why ! such a servant is worse than a mother !

BARONESS (*to Frontin*) : She was an eternal pedant at my ears.

FRONTIN : She took it on herself to give you advice ; she would have ended up by corrupting you.

BARONESS : I was only too anxious to get rid of her ; but I am a woman of habits and I don't like new faces.

KNIGHT : It would be annoying, though, if she went off in the first flush of her anger to M. Turcaret and gave him impressions which would suit neither you nor me.

FRONTIN (*to the Knight*) : Oh ! The devil ! She will not fail to ; waiting-maids are like pious ladies—they do charitable deeds to avenge themselves.

BARONESS (*to Knight*) : What is there to trouble about ? I am not afraid of her. I have wit and M. Turcaret has none ; I do not love him and he is amorous. I shall be able to make a merit to him of having dismissed her.

FRONTIN : Very good, Madam ; one ought to turn everything to account !

BARONESS : But it occurs to me that it is not enough to have got rid of Marine ; I must carry out another idea which comes into my mind.

KNIGHT : What idea, Madam ?

BARONESS : M. Turcaret's lackey is a fool, an idiot, from whom one cannot obtain the least service ; I should like to put in his place an able man, one of those superior geniuses who are made to control mediocre minds and to keep them always in the state one needs.

FRONTIN : One of those superior geniuses ! I see what you are coming to, Madam ; this concerns me.

KNIGHT : Indeed, Frontin would not be useless to us if he were near our financier.

BARONESS : I want to place him there.

KNIGHT : He will keep us well informed, will he not ?

FRONTIN : I am jealous of the idea ; nothing better could be imagined. Faith ! M. Turcaret, on my word, I will make you see the world !

BARONESS : He has made me a present of a note to bearer worth ten thousand crowns ; I want to change it ; it must be turned into money ; I do not know anyone to do it ; you must undertake that, Knight ; I shall hand you the note. Redeem my ring, I shall be very glad to have it and you shall render me an account of the surplus.

FRONTIN : That is judicious, Madam ; you have nothing to fear from our probity.

KNIGHT : I shall lose no time, Madam, and you shall have the money immediately.

BARONESS : Wait a moment and I will give you the note.

(Goes)

FRONTIN : A note for ten thousand crowns ! A happy windfall ; a good woman ! One has to be as lucky as you are to meet such luck ; do you know, I think she is a little too credulous to be a coquette ?

KNIGHT : You are right.

FRONTIN : It's not bad repayment for the sacrifice of our old fool of a countess, who hasn't a penny.

KNIGHT : It is true.

FRONTIN : The Baroness is convinced you lost a thousand crowns on your word and that her diamond is in pawn ; shall you return it to her, sir, with the remainder of the note ?

KNIGHT : Shall I return it to her !

FRONTIN : What ! Whole, with no fresh item of expense ?

KNIGHT : Certainly, I shall be careful to do so.

FRONTIN : You have moments of justice ; I did not expect it of you.

KNIGHT : I should be very foolish to risk breaking with her so cheaply.

FRONTIN : Ah ! I beg your pardon. I judged hastily ; I thought you were going to do things by halves.

KNIGHT : Oh, no ! If ever I quarrel with her, it will only be after the complete ruin of M. Turcaret.

FRONTIN : After his destruction, his annihilation ?

KNIGHT : I only pay attentions to the coquette to ruin the financier.

FRONTIN : Very good ; in these generous sentiments I recognise my master.

(Enter Baroness)

KNIGHT *(aside to Frontin)* : Hush ! Frontin, here is the Baroness.

BARONESS : There, Knight, go without waiting any longer and negotiate this note, and return my ring as quickly as you can.

KNIGHT : Frontin, Madam, shall bring it you immediately : but before I leave you, allow me, charmed with your generous manners, to make known to you. . .

BARONESS : No, I forbid it ; do not let us speak of it.

KNIGHT : What a constraint for a heart so grateful as mine !

BARONESS : *(going)* Not good-bye, Knight. I think we shall soon see each other again.

KNIGHT : Could I leave you without so sweet a hope !
(Conducts the Baroness who enters her apartment, and goes)

FRONTIN *(alone)* : I marvel at the course of human life ! We pluck a coquette ; the coquette devours a man of affairs ; the man of affairs pillages others : and all this makes the most diverting chain of knaveries imaginable.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

(Baroness and Frontin)

FRONTIN (*giving her the diamond*) : I have lost no time as you see, Madam ; here is your diamond ; the man who had it in pawn placed it in my hands as soon as he saw the glitter of the note to bearer, which he will cash provided he makes an honest little profit. My master, whom I left with him, is coming to render you an account.

BARONESS : I am rid of Marine at last ; she took her part seriously, I thought it was only a feint ; she has gone. And so, Frontin, I shall need a waiting-woman ; I leave it to you to find me another.

FRONTIN : I have what you need in hand ; she is a young person, gentle, yielding, just what you want ; she will see everything in your house turned upside down without uttering a syllable.

BARONESS : I like such characters. You know her particularly well ?

FRONTIN : Very particularly ; we are even slightly related.

BARONESS : Which means she is to be relied upon.

FRONTIN : As myself ; she is under my protection ; I dispose of her wages and profits and I am careful to supply all her little needs.

BARONESS : And she is in service now ?

FRONTIN : No, she left her situation a few days ago.

BARONESS : For what reason ?

FRONTIN : She was with people who live a retired life, who receive no serious visits ; a husband and wife who love each other, most extraordinary people ; in short,

a dismal house, and my ward grew weary of it.

BARONESS: And where is she now?

FRONTIN: She is lodging with an old prude of my acquaintance, who charitably takes in chamber-maids out of a situation, to find out what happens in families.

BARONESS: I should like to have her to-day; I cannot get on without a maid.

FRONTIN: I will send her to you, or bring her to you myself; you will be pleased with her. I have not told you all her good qualities; she sings and plays ravishingly on all sorts of instruments.

BARONESS: You tell me of a very delightful person, Frontin.

FRONTIN: I guarantee it; I mean her to enter the Opera; but first of all I want her to grow used to the world; for only fully developed girls are wanted there. *(Goes)*.

BARONESS: I await her impatiently.

(Enter M. Turcaret)

BARONESS *(perceiving M. Turcaret, to herself)*: But I see M. Turcaret. Ah! How disturbed he appears! Marine must have been to see him.

M. TURCARET *(breathlessly)*: Ouf! I don't know where to begin; perfidious creature!

BARONESS *(aside)*: She has talked to him.

M. TURCARET: I have heard news of you, you false hussy! I have heard news of you; I have just had an account of your perfidies and your disorders!

BARONESS *(aloud)*: An agreeable opening; and you make use of very pretty terms, sir.

M. TURCARET: Let me speak; I want to tell you what you are; Marine has told me about you. That fine Knight who comes here at all hours, whom I suspected not without reason, is not your cousin as you made me

believe ; you have designs to marry him and to give me the slip when you have made your fortune out of me.

BARONESS : I, sir, I love the Knight !

M. TURCARET : Marine assured me of it and that he only cut a figure in the world at the expense of your purse and mine, and that you sacrifice to him all the presents I make you.

BARONESS : Marine is very pretty ! Did she tell you nothing but that, sir ?

M. TURCARET : Don't answer me, baggage ! I have evidence against you ! Don't answer me. Speak. Where is that great diamond, for instance, the one I gave you the other day ? Show it me at once, show it me.

BARONESS : Since you take that tone, sir, I certainly shall not show it you.

M. TURCARET : Hey ! Damme ! And what tone do you suppose I should take ? Oh ! You'll not escape with a scolding ! I'm not such a fool as to break with you quietly and retire in silence ; I shall leave marks of my resentment here. I'm a gentleman, I am ; I like honesty ; I had only honest designs here ; I'm not afraid of scandal. Ah ! You haven't a parson to deal with, I assure you.

(Goes into Baroness's room)

BARONESS : No, I have to deal with a madman, a lunatic ! . . . Oh well ! do as you please, sir, do as you please ; I shall not resist, I assure you. . . . *(Noise of breakage within)* But. . . What is that I hear ! . . . *(More noise)* Heavens ! What a disturbance ! . . . He has really gone mad ! . . . Monsieur Turcaret, monsieur Turcaret, I will make you pay for your outrages !

(Re-enter M. Turcaret)

M. TURCARET : I feel a little relieved. I have already broken the large mirror and the finest porcelains.

BARONESS : Go on, sir ; why do you not finish them off ?

M. TURCARET: I shall go on when I please, Madam. . . I'll teach you to play fast and loose with a man like me. . . Come, that note to bearer I sent you just now—give it back to me!

BARONESS: Give it back to you! And suppose I have given it to my cousin too?

M. TURCARET: Ah! If I believed that!

BARONESS: How foolish you are! Indeed you make me pity you.

M. TURCARET: What! Instead of throwing yourself at my knees and asking my pardon, she tells me I am in the wrong, she tells me I am in the wrong!

BARONESS: Certainly.

M. TURCARET: Ah! Really now, I wish you would undertake for your own good to convince me of it.

BARONESS: I would do it, if you were in a state to listen to reason.

M. TURCARET: And what could you say to me, traitress!

BARONESS: I shall say nothing to you. What a fury!

M. TURCARET (*breathlessly*): Speak, Madam, speak; I am calm.

BARONESS: Listen to me then. . . All the extravagances you have just committed are founded on a false report which Marine. . .

M. TURCARET: A false report! Ventrebleu! It is not. . .

BARONESS: Sir, do not swear and do not interrupt me; remember you are calm.

M. TURCARET: I am silent; I must restrain myself.

BARONESS: Do you know why I have just dismissed Marine?

M. TURCARET: Yes, because she defended my interests too warmly.

BARONESS: On the contrary, it was because she was constantly reproaching me with the inclination I have

for you. "Is there anything so ridiculous", she would say to me continuously, "as for a colonel's widow to think of a M. Turcaret, a man without birth, without wit, of the lowest appearance. . ."

M. TURCARET: Let us pass over the qualities, if you please; that Marine is an impudent hussy.

BARONESS: "While you could choose a husband from any twenty men of the first quality; when you refuse your consent even to the pressing instances of the whole family of a marquess by whom you are adored and whom you are weak enough to sacrifice to this M. Turcaret."

M. TURCARET: It is not possible.

BARONESS: I do not pretend to make a merit of it, sir. This young marquess is a young nobleman of very agreeable person, but his morals and conduct do not please me. He comes here sometimes with my cousin the Knight, his friend. I found out he had won Marine to his interests and for that reason I dismissed her. She has come and poured out a thousand impossibilities to you to avenge herself, and you were credulous enough to believe her. Ought you not at the time to have reflected that a servant in a passion was speaking to you, that had I had anything to reproach myself with I should not have been so imprudent as to dismiss a girl whose indiscretion I had to fear? Tell, me, did not this thought present itself spontaneously to your mind?

M. TURCARET: I agree, but. . .

BARONESS: But, but, you are in the wrong. Did she not tell you among other things that I no longer had the large diamond you put on my finger playfully the other day and forced me to accept?

M. TURCARET: Oh yes! She swore to me that you gave it to-day to the Knight, who, she says, is as much your relative as Johnny Green.¹

¹ Or "Jack in the Green"—Jean Vert.

BARONESS: And if I were to show you the diamond at this moment, what would you say?

M. TURCARET: Oh! in that case I should say that. . . But that cannot be.

BARONESS: Here it is, sir; do you recognise it? You see what reliance is to be placed on the gossip of servants.

M. TURCARET: Ah! That Marine is an abominable creature! I recognise her knavery and my injustice; pardon me, Madam, for having suspected your good faith.

BARONESS: No, your furious behaviour is inexcusable; why, you are unworthy of forgiveness.

M. TURCARET: I admit it.

BARONESS: Should you have allowed yourself to be so easily prejudiced against a woman who loves you but too tenderly?

M. TURCARET: Alas! No. . . How unlucky I am!

BARONESS: Admit that you are a very weak man.

M. TURCARET: Yes, Madam.

BARONESS: A complete dupe.

M. TURCARET: I admit it. Ah! Marine! you jade! You cannot imagine all the lies that gallows-bird told me. . . She said you and the Knight looked on me as a milch-cow; and that as soon as I had given you all I have, you would slam your door in my face.

BARONESS: The wretch!

M. TURCARET: She told me so, it's a fact; I never invent anything.

BARONESS: And you were weak enough to believe her even for one moment!

M. TURCARET: Yes, Madam, I was taken in by it like a complete fool. . . Where the devil were my wits?

BARONESS: But you repent of your credulity?

M. TURCARET (*throwing himself on his knees*): Do I repent it! I ask a thousand pardons for my anger.

BARONESS (*raising him*): You are pardoned. Get up, sir. You would be less jealous if you were less in love, and the excess of the one atones for the violence of the other.

M. TURCARET: What goodness! . . . It must be admitted that I am a great brutal fellow.

BARONESS: But seriously, sir, do you think I could hesitate a moment between you and the Knight?

M. TURCARET: No, Madam, I do not think so; but I fear it.

BARONESS: What can be done to dissipate your fears?

M. TURCARET: Banish that man from here; consent to it, Madam; I know it can be done.

BARONESS: And how?

M. TURCARET: I will give him a superintendency¹ in the country.

BARONESS: A superintendency!

M. TURCARET: That is my method of getting rid of troublesome people. . . Ah! how many cousins, uncles and husbands I have made superintendents in my life! I have sent them as far as Canada.

BARONESS: But you forget my cousin is a man of quality and that this sort of post would not suit him. . . Come now, without putting you to the trouble of removing him from Paris, I swear to you that he is the very man in the world who should cause you least anxiety.

M. TURCARET: Ouf! I am suffocated with love and joy; you say that in so natural a way that you convince me. . . Good-bye, my adorable, my all, my goddess. . . Come, come, I will make up for my recent stupidity. Your large glass was not altogether clear, at any rate; and I thought your porcelain rather common.

BARONESS: It is true.

M. TURCARET: I will get you others.

¹ "Directions"; these "Directeurs" were employed by the revenue-farmers,

BARONESS : See what your follies cost you.

M. TURCARET : Nonsense ! . . . The whole lot I broke was not worth more than three hundred pistoles.

(He was about to leave when the Baroness stops him)

BARONESS : Wait, sir ; I have a petition to make before you go.

M. TURCARET : A petition ! Oh ! Give your orders.

BARONESS : For love of me, give an appointment to poor Flamand, your lackey. He is young man to whom I feel very friendly.

M. TURCARET : I should have pushed him on before now, if I had discovered any aptitude in him ; but his mind is too foolish and good-natured ; it would be useless in business.

BARONESS : Give him some employment not difficult to fulfil.

M. TURCARET : He shall have one from to-day ; count it done.

BARONESS : But that is not all ; I want to place with you Frontin, the lackey of my cousin the Knight ; he is a very good servant.

M. TURCARET : I will take him, Madam, and promise you to make him a clerk on the first occasion.

(Enter Frontin)

FRONTIN *(to Baroness)* : Madam, you will soon have the girl I spoke to you about.

BARONESS *(to M. Turcaret)* : Sir, this is the young man I want you to take.

M. TURCARET : He looks rather an innocent.

BARONESS : How well you understand physiognomy !

M. TURCARET : I have an infallible eye for it. . .

(To Frontin) : Come here, my friend ; tell me, have you a few principles yet ?

FRONTIN : What do you mean by principles ?

M. TURCARET: A clerk's principles; I mean do you know how to prevent frauds or to countenance them?

FRONTIN: Not yet, sir; but I feel I should learn that very easily.

M. TURCARET: At least you know arithmetic? you can keep accounts in single entry?

FRONTIN: Oh! Yes, sir; I can keep them in double entry. I can write in two handwritings as well, sometimes one, sometimes the other.

M. TURCARET: Roundhand, I suppose?

FRONTIN: Roundhand, yes and oblique.

M. TURCARET: What do you mean by oblique?

FRONTIN: Oh, yes, a handwriting you know . . . there . . . a certain handwriting which is not legitimate.

M. TURCARET (*to the Baroness*): He means bastard.

FRONTIN: Exactly; that is the word I was looking for.

M. TURCARET (*to the Baroness*): What ingenuousness! . . . This young man, Madam, is a simpleton.

BARONESS: He will get over it in your offices.

M. TURCARET: Oh! yes, Madam, oh, yes! Besides he does not need a good wit to make his way. Except myself and one or two others, there are none but common geniuses among us. All that is needed is a certain practice and routine which you cannot fail to pick up. We see so many people! We study to take the best there is in the world; that is all our science.

BARONESS: It is not the most useless of all.

M. TURCARET (*to Frontin*): And now, my friend, you are in my service and your wages run from this moment.

FRONTIN: Then I look upon you, sir, as my new master. . . But as the Knight's former lackey I must acquit myself of a commission he imposed upon me; he is giving a supper to you and to Madam, his cousin, here to-night.

M. TURCARET: Most willingly.

FRONTIN: I am going to order from Fite¹ all sorts of dishes with twenty-four bottles of champagne; and to enliven the meal you will have voices and instruments.

BARONESS: Music, Frontin?

FRONTIN: Yes, Madam; by the same token I am bid to order a hundred bottles of Suresnes to wash down the symphony.

BARONESS: A hundred bottles!

FRONTIN: It is not too much, Madam. There will be eight concert performers, four Italians from Paris, three women singers and two fat tenors.

M. TURCARET: Faith, he is right, it is not too much. This will be a very pretty meal.

FRONTIN: The devil! When the Knight gives suppers like this, he spares nothing, sir.

M. TURCARET: I am sure of it.

FRONTIN: It seems he has at his disposal the purse of a financier.

BARONESS (*to M. Turcaret*): He means that he does things very magnificently.

M. TURCARET: How ingenuous he is! (*To Frontin*): Well, we shall see that later. (*To the Baroness*): And as an additional pleasure I will bring with me M. Gloutonneau, the poet; you know I cannot eat unless I have one of the wits at my table.

BARONESS: You will do me a pleasure. I suppose this author is very brilliant in conversation?

M. TURCARET: He never says four words at a meal; but he eats and thinks enormously. Peste! he is a most agreeable man. . . And now I must rush to Dantel² and buy you. . .

BARONESS: Take care what you are doing, I beg you: do not run into expense.

M. TURCARET (*interrupting her in his turn*): Eh! Fie, Madam, fie! you stick at trilles. Not good-bye, my queen.

¹ A celebrated restaurant keeper of the day.

² A famous jeweller of the time.

BARONESS : I await your return impatiently.

(M. Turcaret goes)

BARONESS : Well, you are on the way to make your fortune.

FRONTIN : Yes, Madam, and in a position not to do harm to yours.

BARONESS : It is now, Frontin, that you must give freedom to that superior genius.

FRONTIN : We shall try to prove to you that it is not mediocre.

BARONESS : When is this girl to be brought here ?

FRONTIN : I am waiting for her ; I arranged to meet her here.

BARONESS : Let me know when she comes.

(She goes into her room)

FRONTIN *(alone)* : Courage, Frontin ! Courage, my friend ! Fortune calls you ! You are in the house of a business man through the influence of a coquette. What joy ! What an agreeable prospect ! I imagine everything I touch is about to change into gold. . . *(Seeing Lisette)* : But I see my ward.

(Enter Lisette)

FRONTIN : You are welcome, Lisette ; you are impatiently expected in this house.

LISETTE : I enter it with a satisfaction which I think argues well.

FRONTIN : I have informed you of all that is going on here and of all that will go on ; you are to behave accordingly. Only remember you must be indefatigably compliant.

LISETTE : There is no need to recommend that to me.

FRONTIN : Flatter unceasingly the Baroness's infatuation for the Knight ; that is the main point.

LISETTE : You trouble me with unnecessary advice.

(*Enter Knight*)

FRONTIN (*seeing the Knight*) : Here he is.

LISETTE (*observing the Knight*) : I have never seen him before. . . Ah ! How handsome he is, Frontin !

FRONTIN : A man must not be badly built if he is to have a coquette love him.

KNIGHT (*to Frontin, without seeing Lisette at first*) : I meet you luckily, Frontin, to inform you. . . (*Sees Lisette*) : But what is this I see ? Who is this brilliant beauty ?

FRONTIN : A maid I have introduced to the Baroness to replace Marine.

KNIGHT : And no doubt she is one of your friends ?

FRONTIN : Yes, sir ; we have known each other a long time. I am responsible for her behaviour.

KNIGHT : Excellent surety ! It is praising yourself in a word. Parbleu ! She is charming. . . Master Surety, I have to complain of you.

FRONTIN : For what reason ?

KNIGHT : I have to complain of you, I say. You know all my affairs and you hide yours from me. You are not a sincere friend.

FRONTIN : I did not want, sir. . .

KNIGHT (*interrupting him*) : But confidence ought to be reciprocal. Why did you conceal so fair a discovery from me ?

FRONTIN : Faith, sir, I feared. . .

KNIGHT (*interrupting*) : What ?

FRONTIN : The devil ! You understand the rest, sir.

KNIGHT (*aside*) : The rogue ! where did he unearth that pretty little face ? (*To Frontin*) : Frontin, master Frontin,

you have a fine and delicate discernment when you make a choice for yourself ; but you have not so good a taste for your friends. . . Ah ! What a charming portrait ! What an adorable waiting-maid !

LISETTE (*aside*) : How agreeable these young noble-men are !

KNIGHT : No, I have never seen anything so beautiful as this creature.

LISETTE (*aside*) : How flattering his expressions are ! . . . I am not surprised the women run after them.

KNIGHT (*to Frontin*) : Make an exchange, Frontin ; let me have this girl and I abandon my old countess to you.

FRONTIN : No, sir ; I have plebeian inclinations ; I hold to Lisette, to whom I have pledged my faith.

KNIGHT : Ah, you may boast yourself the luckiest scoundrel . . . (*To Lisette*) : Yes, fair Lisette, you deserve. . .

LISETTE (*interrupting*) : No more flattery, sir. I am going to present myself to my mistress, who has not yet seen me ; you can come, if you like, and continue the conversation in her presence.

(*She goes into the Baroness's room*)

KNIGHT : Now let us talk of serious matters, Frontin. I have not brought the Baroness the money for her note.

FRONTIN : So much the worse.

KNIGHT : I went to look for an usurer who has lent me money before, but he is not in Paris. Business affairs which involved him have forced him to leave Paris suddenly ; and so I shall hand the note to you.

FRONTIN : Why ?

KNIGHT : Did you not tell me you knew a money-changer who would give you money at an hour's notice ?

FRONTIN : True : but what will you say to the

Baroness? If you tell her that you still have her note, she will see we didn't pawn her diamond; for she must know that a man who lends money would never give back his pledge for nothing.

KNIGHT: You are right; and therefore I intend to tell her that I have cashed the money, that it is at my house and that to-morrow morning you will have it brought here. Meanwhile run to the money-changer, and take the money you receive to my lodging. I will wait for you there as soon as I have spoken to the Baroness.

(Goes into the Baroness's room)

FRONTIN (*alone*): I don't lack occupation, thank God! I must go to the restaurant keeper; from there to the money-changer, from the money-changer to the lodging; and then I must return here to join M. Turcaret. It seems to me that is what is called an active life. . . But, patience! After some time of fatigue and trouble, I shall come at last to a state of ease. Then, what a satisfaction! What tranquillity of mind! . . . Then I shall have nothing to do but try to quiet my conscience.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

(Baroness, Frontin, Lisette)

BARONESS : Well, Frontin ! Have you ordered the supper ? Will there be excellent cheer ?

FRONTIN : I will answer for it, Madam ; ask Lisette in what manner I myself entertain, and judge from that what I can do when I entertain at someone else's expense.

LISETTE : It is true, Madam ; you can rely on him.

FRONTIN : The Knight is waiting for me. I am going to give him an account of the arrangements for his banquet ; and then I shall come here to take possession of M. Turcaret, my new master.

(Goes)

LISETTE : That young man is a young man of merit, Madam.

BARONESS : It appears to me you do not lack it either, Lisette.

LISETTE : He is very practical.

BARONESS : I think you are no less able.

LISETTE : I should be very happy, Madam, if my small talents should be useful to you.

BARONESS : I am pleased with you. But I have a warning to give you ; I do not wish to be flattered.

LISETTE : I am an enemy of flattery.

BARONESS : Above all, when I consult you about matters concerning myself, be sincere.

LISETTE : I shall not fail to be, Madam.

BARONESS : Yet I think you are too compliant.

LISETTE : Me, Madam ?

BARONESS : Yes, you do not sufficiently oppose my feelings about the Knight.

LISETTE : Eh ! Why oppose them ! They are so reasonable.

BARONESS : I confess the Knight seems to me worthy of all my affection.

LISETTE : My judgment is the same.

BARONESS : He has a genuine and constant passion.

LISETTE : A faithful and sincere Knight ! They are scarcely ever seen now.

BARONESS : Even so recently as to-day he sacrificed a countess for me.

LISETTE : A countess !

BARONESS : She is not in her first youth, it is true.

LISETTE : But that makes the sacrifice all the greater. I know these Knights well : it costs them more to sacrifice an old lady than a young one.

BARONESS : He is coming to account to me for a note I entrusted to him. How honourable he is !

LISETTE : It is wonderful.

BARONESS : His probity reaches over-scrupulousness.

LISETTE : Why, this is a Knight unique in his kind !

BARONESS : Hush ! I see M. Turcaret.

(Enter M. Turcaret)

M. TURCARET : I have just, Madam. . . *(Perceiving Lisette)* : Oh ! Ho ! you have a new chamber-maid ?

BARONESS : Yes, sir. How does she seem to you ?

M. TURCARET *(gazing at Lisette)* : How does she seem to me ? I rather like her ; we must make each other's acquaintance.

LISETTE : The acquaintance is soon made, sir.

BARONESS : You know we are supping here ? Give

orders for the table to be clean laid and for the rooms to be well lighted.

(Lisette goes)

M. TURCARET : I think that a very reasonable girl.

BARONESS : She is very much in your interests, at least.

M. TURCARET : I am much obliged to her. . . I have just, Madam, bought you ten thousand francs worth of mirrors, porcelains and writing-tables. They are in exquisite taste : I chose them myself.

BARONESS : You are universal, sir ; you understand everything.

M. TURCARET : Yes, thanks be to Heaven, and especially in architecture. You shall see, you shall see the house I am going to have built.

BARONESS : What ! You are going to build a house ?

M. TURCARET : I have already bought the ground, which contains four acres, six roods, nine poles, three feet, eleven inches. A fine area, is it not ?

BARONESS : Very fine.

M. TURCARET : The house will be magnificent. I don't want to have the least thing missing ; I would rather pull it down two or three times.

BARONESS : I do not doubt it.

M. TURCARET : Malpeste ! I must be careful to do nothing common, you know ; I should be hissed by all the other financiers.

BARONESS : Assuredly.

M. TURCARET *(observing the Marquess outside)* : Who is this man coming in ?

BARONESS *(whispers)* : The young Marquess I told you about whose cause Marine had espoused. I could very well do without his visits, they give me no pleasure.

(Enter Marquess)

MARQUESS *(aside)* : I wager I shall not find the Knight here yet.

M. TURCARET (*aside*): Ah! Morbleu! It is the Marquess de la Tribaudiere. . . What an unfortunate meeting!

MARQUESS (*aside*): I have been looking for him for nearly two days. (*Perceiving M. Turcaret*): Eh! What do I see? . . . Yes. . . No. . . Pardon me . . . precisely. . . it is himself, M. Turcaret. (*To the Baroness*) What are you doing with this man, Madam? You know him! Are you borrowing from him on pledges? Palsambleu! He will ruin you.

BARONESS: Marquess . . .

MARQUESS (*interrupting*): He will pillage you, he will fleece you; I warn you. He is the most jewish of usurers; he sells his money for its weight in gold.

M. TURCARET (*aside*): I should have done better to leave.

BARONESS (*to Marquess*): You are mistaken, Marquess; M. Turcaret passes in the world for a man of property¹ and honour.

MARQUESS: And so he is, Madam, and so he is. He likes men's property and women's honour. That is his reputation.

M. TURCARET: You like to have your jest, Marquess. (*To Baroness*): He is playful, Madam, playful. Do you not know him in this state?

BARONESS: Oh yes, I see that he is being playful or that he is wrongly informed.

MARQUESS: Wrongly informed! Morbleu! Madam, nobody can talk to you about it better than I; at this very moment he has my things.

M. TURCARET: Your things, sir? Oh! I will take my oath to the contrary.

MARQUESS: Parbleu! You are right. The diamond

¹ "Homme de bien," really "a man of virtue," but the phrase contains the *double entendre* of "a man of property" as well.

is yours now, according to our arrangement ; I let the period of redemption run out.

BARONESS : Explain this enigma to me, both of you.

M. TURCARET : There is no enigma in it, Madam, I don't know anything about it.

MARQUESS (*to Baroness*) : He is right, it is quite clear, there is no enigma. Fifteen months ago I needed money. I had a diamond worth five hundred louis ; I was sent to M. Turcaret. M. Turcaret sent me to one of his clerks, a certain M. Gr. . Gr. . . Grab.¹ He keeps the usury office. This honest M. Grab lent me on my ring eleven hundred and thirty-two livres, six sols, eight deniers. He set me a time in which to redeem it. I am not very exact, the term expired ; my diamond is lost.

M. TURCARET : Marquess, Marquess, don't confuse me with M. Grab, I beg you. He is a rascal I have dismissed. If he has played a shady trick on you, you can appeal to the law. I know nothing about your diamond ; I have never seen it or handled it.

MARQUESS : It came to me from my aunt ; it was one of the finest diamonds ; its clearness, its shape, its size were about like . . . (*Looking at the Baroness's diamond*) : Eh ! There it is, Madam ! You came to terms about it with M. Turcaret, I suppose ?

BARONESS (*to Marquess*) : Another error, sir. I bought it rather dear from a woman second-hand dealer.

MARQUESS : It comes from him, Madam. He has women dealers at his disposition, and even, I am told, in his family.

M. TURCARET : Sir ! Sir !

BARONESS : You are insulting, Marquess.

MARQUESS : No, Madam, I have no intention of insulting. I am too much M. Turcaret's servant although he treats me harshly. At one time we were quite friendly together. He was my grandfather's lackey and carried

¹ M. Raffe.

me in his arms. We played together every day, and hardly ever left each other. The little ingrate does not remember it.

M. TURCARET: I remember it. . . I remember it. . . The past is past ; I only think of the present.

BARONESS (*to Marquess*): I beg you to change the subject, Marquess. Are you looking for the Knight ?

MARQUESS: I have been looking for him everywhere, Madam, at the theatres, the cabaret, the ball, at lansquenet ; I cannot find him anywhere. The rascal is growing debauched ; he is becoming a libertine.

BARONESS: I shall scold him for it.

MARQUESS: I beg you will. . . For my part, I never alter ; I lead a regular life ; I am always at table ; I get credit at Fite's and La Morlière's¹ because they know I shall soon inherit from an old aunt and because they see I have a more than coming tendency to spend the estate.

BARONESS: You are not a bad customer for restaurant keepers.

MARQUESS: No, Madam, nor for financiers, eh, M. Turcaret ? But my aunt wants me to reform, and to make her think there is already a change in my conduct I am going to see her in my present state. She will be vastly surprised to find me so sober ; she has almost always seen me drunk.

BARONESS: Indeed, Marquess, it is a novelty to see you otherwise. You have fallen into an excess of sobriety to-day.

MARQUESS: Last night I supped with two or three of the prettiest women in Paris. We drank until it was daylight ; I went home and took a little nap so that I could present myself fresh before my aunt.

BARONESS: You are very prudent.

MARQUESS: Good-bye, most amiable lady ! Tell the

¹ Another well-known restaurant.

Knight to return to his friends a little. Lend him to us sometimes ; or I shall come here so often I shall find him here. Good-bye, M. Turcaret. There's no rancour on my side, at any rate. (*Holding out his hand*) : Shake hands, let us renew our old friendship. But just hint to your tool, M. Grab, to treat me more humanely the next time I need him.

(*Goes*)

M. TURCARET : What an acquaintance, Madam ! He is the greatest madman and liar I know.

BARONESS : That is saying a good deal.

M. TURCARET : How much I suffered during that conversation !

BARONESS : So I perceived.

M. TURCARET : I dislike people who are not honest.

BARONESS : You are quite right.

M. TURCARET : I was so surprised to hear the things he said I had no strength to answer them. Did you not notice ?

BARONESS : You acted wisely ; I admired your moderation.

M. TURCARET : I a usurer ! What a calumny !

BARONESS : That concerns M. Grab rather than you.

M. TURCARET : To try to make it a crime in people that they lend on pledges ! . . . It is better to lend on pledges than to lend on nothing.

BARONESS : Assuredly.

M. TURCARET : To come and tell me to my face that I was his grandfather's lackey ! Nothing could be falser ; I was never anything but his financial adviser.

BARONESS : And even if it were true, where is the disgrace ? It was so long ago. . . It is forgotten by prescription.

M. TURCARET : Yes, no doubt.

BARONESS : These sorts of malicious tales make no

impression on my mind ; you are far too well established in my heart.

M. TURCARET : You do me too great a favour.

BARONESS : You are a man of merit.

M. TURCARET : You are jesting.

BARONESS : A true man of honour.

M. TURCARET : Oh ! Not at all !

BARONESS : And you have too much the air and manners of a person of quality for you to be suspected of not being one.

(Enter Flamand)

FLAMAND : Sir ! . . .

M. TURCARET : What do you want ?

FLAMAND : Someone downstairs wants you.

M. TURCARET : Who is it, blockhead ?

FLAMAND : That gentleman you know. . . why that gentleman. . . Monsieur. . . Thingamy. . .

M. TURCARET : Monsieur Thingamy !

FLAMAND : Eh ! Yes, that clerk you like so much. As soon as he comes to talk to you, you make everyone go away at once and let no one listen to you.

M. TURCARET : It is M. Grab, I suppose ?

FLAMAND : Yes, that's right, sir, that's who it is.

M. TURCARET : I will go down to him ; tell him to wait for me.

BARONESS : Did you not say you had dismissed him ?

M. TURCARET : Yes, and that is why he has come here. He is trying to patch things up. At bottom he is quite a good man, a confidential servant. I will go and see what he wants.

BARONESS : Ah ! No, no. . . Tell him to come up, Flamand.

(Flamand goes)

BARONESS : Sir, you will speak to him in this room. Are you not at home here ?

M. TURCARET: You are very polite, Madam.

BARONESS: I will not disturb your conversation; I shall leave you. . . Do not forget what I asked you on behalf of Flamand.

M. TURCARET: My orders are already given in the matter; you shall be satisfied.

(Baroness goes to her room)

(Enter M. Grab)

M. TURCARET: What is the matter, M. Grab? Why do you come here for me? Don't you know that when we are with the ladies it is not for the purpose of talking about business?

M. GRAB: The importance of what I have to communicate must serve as my excuse.

M. TURCARET: What are these important things?

M. GRAB: Can I speak freely here?

M. TURCARET: Yes, you can; I am master here. Speak.

M. GRAB *(taking papers out of his pocket and looking into a memorandum book)*: First, that young man of good family to whom we lent three thousand livres last year and whom I forced to sign a bill for nine, sees that he is on the point of being worried for payment and has confessed the matter to his uncle, the president,¹ who, in agreement with the whole family is now working to ruin us.

M. TURCARET: Pains wasted, that work. . . Let them come, I am not so easily frightened.

M. GRAB *(after looking at his memoranda)*: That pay-officer² you guaranteed, and who has just gone bankrupt for two hundred thousand crowns. . . .

¹ A magistrate.

² Or "cashier."

M. TURCARET (*interrupting*): It was by my order he. . . I know where he is.

M. GRAB: But proceedings are being taken against you. The affair is serious and pressing.

M. TURCARET: It will be patched up. I have taken my measures; it will be settled to-morrow.

M. GRAB: I am afraid it may be too late.

M. TURCARET: You are too timid. . . Have you been to see that young man in the Rue Quincampoix¹ for whom I got a pay-office?

M. GRAB: Yes, sir. He is ready to lend you twenty thousand francs out of the first money he receives, on condition that he may use for his own profit what remains with the company, and that you will take his part if the practice is discovered.

M. TURCARET: That is according to the rules; nothing could be juster; he is a reasonable fellow. You will tell him, M. Grab, that I shall protect him in all his affairs. Is there anything else?

M. GRAB (*after looking at his memoranda again*): That tall thin man who gave you two thousand francs two months ago for a superintendency you got him at Volognes.

M. TURCARET (*interrupting*): Well?

M. GRAB: A misfortune has happened to him.

M. TURCARET: What?

M. GRAB: His good faith has been abused; he has been robbed of fifteen thousand francs. . . At bottom he is too good.

M. TURCARET: Too good, too good! Hey! Why the devil did he go into business then? Too good, too good!

M. GRAB: He wrote me a very touching letter in which he begs you to have pity on him.

M. TURCARET: Wasted paper, useless letter.

¹ This was the street where the stock-brokers had their offices.

M. GRAB : And to act in such a way that he shall not be dismissed.

M. TURCARET : I shall rather act so that he will be ; the office will return to me and I shall sell it to someone else for the same price.

M. GRAB : That is what I thought.

M. TURCARET : It would be acting against my own interests ; I should deserve to be expelled publicly from the company.

M. GRAB : I am no more touched by the complaints of fools than you are. . . I have already replied to him and told him he cannot count upon you.

M. TURCARET : No, parbleu !

M. GRAB (*looking at his memoranda again*) : Will you take at seven per cent. fifteen thousand francs which an honest locksmith of my acquaintance has amassed by his labour and saving ?

M. TURCARET : Yes, yes, that's all right ; I will do him that favour. Go and get him ; I shall be at my house in a quarter of an hour. Let him bring the money. Go, go.

M. GRAB (*making a few steps towards the door and then returning*) : I was forgetting the principal affair ; I did not put it in my memoranda.

M. TURCARET : And what is this principal affair ?

M. GRAB : News which will greatly surprise you. Madam Turcaret is in Paris.

M. TURCARET (*in a low voice*) : Speak lower, M. Grab, speak lower.

M. GRAB (*in a low voice*) : I met her yesterday in a hackney carriage with a kind of young nobleman whose face is not altogether unknown to me and whom I met in the street just now as I arrived here.

M. TURCARET (*in a low voice*) : You did not speak to her ?

M. GRAB (*in a low voice*) : No, but she sent this

morning to beg me to say nothing about it to you and only to remind you that there are due to her fifteen months arrears of the income of four thousand livres a year you pay her to remain in the country ; she will not go back until she gets them.

M. TURCARET (*in a low voice*) : Oh ! Ventrebleu ! M. Grab ! Let her be paid. Let us get rid of the creature at once. This very day you shall take her the locksmith's five hundred pistoles ; but let her go to-morrow.

M. GRAB (*in a low voice*) : Oh ! She asks nothing better. I will go and find the citizen and bring him to your house.

M. TURCARET (*in a low voice*) : You will find me there.

(*M. Grab goes*)

M. TURCARET : Malepeste ! It would be an unpleasant matter if Madam Turcaret took it into her head to come to this house : she would ruin me in the estimation of the Baroness, to whom I have pretended that I am a widower.

(*Enter Lisette*)

LISETTE : Madam sent me to know, sir, if you were still engaged in business.

M. TURCARET : There was none, my child. They are trifles with which poor devils of clerks trouble their heads, because they are not made for greater things.

(*Enter Frontin*)

FRONTIN (*to M. Turcaret*) : I am delighted, sir, to find you in conversation with this amiable person. Whatever interest I may take in her, I shall take care not to interrupt so soft a conversation.

M. TURCARET : You will not be in the way. Come

here Frontin, I look upon you as a man wholly devoted to my interests and I want you to help me to win this girl's friendship.

LISETTE : That will not be very difficult.

FRONTIN : Oh, as to that, no ! I don't know, sir, under what fortunate star you were born ! But everyone naturally has a great weakness for you.

M. TURCARET : It doesn't come from a star ; it comes from my manners.

LISETTE : They are so fine, so thoughtful !

M. TURCARET : How do you know ?

LISETTE : Ever since I have been here the Baroness has talked of nothing else.

M. TURCARET : You mean it ?

FRONTIN : That woman cannot hide her weakness ; she loves you so tenderly ! Ask Lisette.

LISETTE : Oh ! It is you must be believed, M. Frontin.

FRONTIN : No, I do not myself understand everything I know in the matter ; and what astonishes me above all is the excess to which this passion has arrived without M. Turcaret's having given himself much trouble to try to deserve it.

M. TURCARET : What ? What do you mean ?

FRONTIN : I have seen you twenty times, sir, lacking in attention to certain things. . .

M. TURCARET (*interrupting*) : Oh ! Parbleu ! I have nothing to reproach myself with there, nothing.

LISETTE : Oh ! no ; I am sure M. Turcaret is not a man to let slip the least opportunity of giving pleasure to the persons he loves. That is the only way to deserve love.

FRONTIN : Yet M. Turcaret does not deserve it as much as I should like.

M. TURCARET : Explain yourself.

FRONTIN : Yes ; but you will not take it ill if, as a

faithful and sincere servant, I take the liberty to speak to you openly ?

M. TURCARET : Speak.

FRONTIN : You do not respond enough to the love the Baroness has for you.

M. TURCARET : I do not respond !

FRONTIN : No, sir. . . I let you decide, Lisette. . . M. Turcaret, with all his wit, is lacking in attention.

M. TURCARET : What do you mean by " lacking in attention " ?

FRONTIN : A certain forgetfulness and negligence. . .

M. TURCARET : But when ?

FRONTIN : Well, for instance, is it not a shameful thing that you have not yet thought of giving her a coach ?

LISETTE : Ah, sir, there he is right : your clerks give them to their mistresses.

M. TURCARET : What is the good of a coach ? Hasn't she mine at her disposal when she wants it ?

FRONTIN : Oh, sir, to have one's own carriage or to be forced to use those of one's friends, are two very different things.

LISETTE (*to M. Turcaret*) : You are too much in society not to recognise it ; most women are more moved by the vanity of possessing a coach than by the pleasure even of using it.

M. TURCARET : Yes, I understand that.

FRONTIN : That girl, sir, has very good sense ; she does not talk foolishly, anyway.

M. TURCARET : I don't find you such a fool, either, as I thought you at first, Frontin.

FRONTIN : Since I have had the honour to be in your service I feel wit coming in upon me every moment. Oh ! I foresee that I shall greatly profit from you.

M. TURCARET : It depends wholly upon yourself.

FRONTIN : I protest to you, sir, I do not lack good will. I should give the Baroness then a good large coach, well upholstered. —

M. TURCARET : She shall have one. Your remarks are sensible ; they decide me.

FRONTIN : I knew it was only a lack of attention.

M. TURCARET : Of course ; and as a proof of it I will go and order a coach at once.

FRONTIN : Oh ! Fie, sir ! You must not appear in the matter ; it would not be civil for you to let the world know you are giving a coach to the Baroness. Make use of a third party, an unperceived but faithful tool. I know two or three sadlers who do not yet know I am with you ; if you like I will undertake the task. . .

M. TURCARET (*interrupting*) : Willingly. You seem to me to understand it ; I rely on you. . . (*Gives him his purse*) : Here are sixty pistoles I have left in my purse ; you will pay them on account.

FRONTIN (*taking the purse*) : I shall not fail to, sir. In the matter of horses, I know a master horse-dealer who is my nephew Breton fashion¹ ; he will supply you with very fine ones.

M. TURCARET : Which he will sell me very dear, I suppose ?

FRONTIN : No, sir, he will sell them to you conscientiously.

M. TURCARET : The conscience of a horse-dealer !

FRONTIN : Oh ! I will answer for it as for my own.

M. TURCARET : On that understanding, I will make use of him.

FRONTIN : Another lack of attention. . .

M. TURCARET (*interrupting*) : Be off with your "lack of attention" . . . The rascal will end by ruining me. . . You will tell the Baroness from me that a piece of business, which will soon be finished, calls me away.

(*Goes*)

FRONTIN : Not a bad beginning.

¹ A relative " Breton fashion " is " once removed."

LISETTE: Yes, for the Baroness ; but for us ?

FRONTIN: Here are sixty pistoles we can keep at least. I shall easily make them out of the coach ; put them aside ; they are the first foundations of our joint property.

LISETTE: Yes, but these foundations must be promptly built on ; for, I warn you, I am making moral reflections.

FRONTIN: May one know what they are ?

LISETTE: I am tired of being a waiting maid.

FRONTIN: What the devil ! Are you becoming ambitious ?

LISETTE: Yes, my dear. It must be that the air one breathes in a house frequented by a financier is contrary to modesty ; for in the short time I have been here I have had ideas of grandeur which never came to me before. Make haste to collect some money ; otherwise, whatever arrangements we may have agreed on together, the first rich scoundrel who comes to marry me. . . .

FRONTIN (*interrupting*): But give me the time to get rich.

LISETTE: I give you three years ; that's enough for a man of wit.

FRONTIN: I don't ask any more. . . It is sufficient, my princess. I will spare nothing to deserve you ; and if I fail to succeed, it will not be from lack of attention.

(*Goes*)

LISETTE: I cannot prevent myself from loving Frontin ; he is my Knight ; and from the way he is going I have a secret presentiment that with that young man I shall one day become a woman of quality.

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

(Knight and Frontin)

KNIGHT : What are you doing here ? Did you not tell me you were going to your money-changer ? Did you not find him there again ?

FRONTIN : Excuse me, sir ; he hadn't enough money ; he hadn't the whole sum with him. He told me to return to-night ; I will give you back the note if you wish.

KNIGHT : Eh ! Keep it ; what should I do with it ? . . . Is the Baroness in ? What is she doing ?

FRONTIN : She is talking to Lisette about a coach I am to order for her and about a house in the country which she likes and wishes to rent until I can secure her possession of it.

KNIGHT : A coach, a country house ? What madness !

FRONTIN : Yes : but it is all to be done at M. Turcaret's expense. What wisdom !

KNIGHT : That alters the proposition.

FRONTIN : There is only one difficulty.

KNIGHT : And what is that ?

FRONTIN : The merest trifle.

KNIGHT : Tell me what it is.

FRONTIN : The country house must be furnished. She did not know how to induce M. Turcaret to do it ; but the superior genius she has placed with him has undertaken the task.

KNIGHT : How will you go about it ?

FRONTIN : I am going to find an old scoundrel I know who will help us to draw the ten thousand francs we need to furnish the house.

KNIGHT: Have you given careful attention to your strategem?

FRONTIN: Oh! yes, sir! Attention is my strong point. I have it all in my head; don't be in any concern. A little forged deed. . . A false writ. . .

KNIGHT (*interrupting*): But take care, Frontin; M. Turcaret understands business.

FRONTIN: My old scoundrel knows it even better. He is the most able, the most intelligent scrivener. . .

KNIGHT: That is another matter.

FRONTIN: He has been lodged almost continually in the King's houses, on account of his writings.

KNIGHT: I have nothing more to say.

FRONTIN: I know where to find him for certain; and our machinery will soon be ready. Good-bye. Here is the Marquess looking for you.

(*Goes*)

(*Enter Marquess*)

MARQUESS: Ah! Palsambleu! Knight, you have been making yourself scarce. You are not to be found anywhere. I have been looking for you the last twenty-four hours to consult you about an affair of the heart.

KNIGHT: Eh! And how long have you been mixed up with such affairs?

MARQUESS: Three or four days.

KNIGHT: And you make your first confidence to-day! You are becoming very discreet.

MARQUESS: Devil take me if I had thought of it. An affair of the heart only holds my heart very slightly, as you know. This is a conquest I made by chance, which I kept for amusement and shall get rid of from caprice, or perhaps from reason.

KNIGHT: Wonderful attachment!

MARQUESS: The pleasure of life should not occupy

us too seriously. I never shackle myself with anything. . . She gave me her portrait ; I have lost it. Another man would hang himself but—(*makes a contemptuous gesture*) : I care that for it !

KNIGHT : With such sentiments you must be adored. . . . But tell me, who is this woman ?

MARQUESS : A woman of quality, a countess from the country ; for she told me so herself.

KNIGHT : And at what time did you manage to make this conquest ? Ordinarily, you sleep all day and drink all night.

MARQUESS : Oh ! no, oh ! no, if you please. In that time there are the hours at the ball ; that is where opportunities are to be found.

KNIGHT : That means she is a ball-room acquaintance ?

MARQUESS : Exactly. The other day I went there a little heated with wine ; I was in form ; I was ogling the pretty masks. I noticed a waist, an attitude of the breasts, a turn of the flanks. . . I accost her, I beg, I press, I succeed in getting her to unmask ; I see a person. . .

KNIGHT (*interrupting*) : Young, no doubt ?

MARQUESS : No, rather old.

KNIGHT : But still beautiful and most agreeable ?

MARQUESS : Not very beautiful.

KNIGHT : As far as I can see, love does not blind you.

MARQUESS : I do justice to my beloved.

KNIGHT : She is witty !

MARQUESS : Oh ! for wit, she is a prodigy ! What a flood of words ! What imagination ! She said a hundred extravagant things which charmed me.

KNIGHT : What was the result of the conversation ?

MARQUESS : The result ! I took her home with her companion ; I offered her my services ; and the old fool accepted them !

KNIGHT : You have not seen her since ?

MARQUESS: Next evening as soon as I was up I went to her house.

KNIGHT: Furnished apartment, I suppose?

MARQUESS: Yes, furnished apartment.

KNIGHT: Well?

MARQUESS: Well! More vivacity of conversation, new follies, tender protestations on my part, quick response on hers. She gave me this cursed portrait I lost the day before yesterday; I have not seen her since. She wrote to me. I replied to her; she is waiting for me to-day, but I don't know what I ought to do. Shall I go? Or shall I not go? What do you advise? This was the reason I was looking for you.

KNIGHT: If you don't go, it will be impolite.

MARQUESS: Yes, but if I go it will appear very assiduous. This is a delicate point. To show so much ardour is running after a woman; very plebeian—what do you say?

KNIGHT: To advise you in the matter I should need to know the person.

MARQUESS: I must introduce you. I will take you and your Baroness to supper with her to-night.

KNIGHT: That cannot be to-night; I am giving a supper here.

MARQUESS: Supper here? I will bring my conquest.

KNIGHT: But the Baroness. . .

MARQUESS (*interrupting*): Oh! the Baroness will get on very well with her; it is a good thing for them to know each other; we will sometimes make little parties of four.

KNIGHT: But will your countess not make a difficulty of coming to a house with you alone?

MARQUESS (*interrupting*): Difficulties! Oh! My countess is not one to make difficulties; she is a person who understands life, a woman who has quite got over the prejudices of education.

KNIGHT: Well, bring her; you will do us a favour.

MARQUESS: You will be charmed with her. Such pleasant manners ! You will see a lively woman, petulant, heedless, thoughtless, dissipated and always daubed with snuff. You would not take her for a provincial.

KNIGHT: You draw a charming portrait of her ! We shall see if you are not a flattering painter.

MARQUESS: I shall go and get her. Not good-bye, Knight.

KNIGHT: Servant, Marquess.

(Marquess goes)

KNIGHT: This charming conquest of the Marquess's is apparently a countess like the one I sacrificed to the Baroness.

(Enter Baroness)

BARONESS: What are you doing here alone, Knight ? I thought the Marquess was with you.

KNIGHT *(laughing)*: He has just gone, Madam. . . Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

BARONESS: What are you laughing at ?

KNIGHT: This mad Marquess is in love with a woman from the provinces, a countess who is living in furnished rooms. He has gone to pick her up and bring her here. We shall have the amusement of it.

BARONESS: But tell me, Knight, have you asked her to supper ?

KNIGHT: Yes, Madam ; increase of guests, additional pleasure. M. Turcaret must be amused, diverted.

BARONESS: The presence of the Marquess will not amuse him. You don't know that they are acquainted ; they don't like each other ; just now there was a scene between them. . .

KNIGHT *(interrupting)*: The pleasures of the table will patch everything up. Perhaps they do not get on so

badly together that it is impossible to reconcile them. I will undertake it ; leave it to me ; M. Turcaret is a good fool. . .

BARONESS (*seeing M. Turcaret*) : Hush ! I think he is here. . . I am afraid he heard you.

(*Enter M. Turcaret*)

KNIGHT (*embracing M. Turcaret*) : M. Turcaret must allow me to embrace him and to show him how lively a pleasure we shall soon feel at being with him glass in hand.

M. TURCARET (*embarrassed*) : The pleasure of that liveliness, sir, will be . . . most reciprocal. The honour I receive on the one hand . . . joined with . . . the satisfaction which . . . is found on the other. . . (*Pointing to Baroness*) : with Madam, indeed causes that . . . I assure you. . . that . . . I am very glad of this party.

BARONESS : You are about to involve yourself in compliments, sir, which will embarrass the Knight as well ; and neither of you will ever make an end of it.

KNIGHT (*to M. Turcaret*) : My cousin is right ; let us abolish ceremony and only think of enjoyment. You like music ?

M. TURCARET : Do I like it ? Malepeste ! I subscribe for a box at the Opera.

KNIGHT : It is the ruling passion of people in society.

M. TURCARET : It's mine.

KNIGHT : Music stirs up the passions.

M. TURCARET : Terribly ! A fine voice, supported by a trumpet—throws me into so tender a reverie !

BARONESS : What good taste you have !

KNIGHT (*to M. Turcaret*) : Yes, indeed. What a great fool I am not to have thought of that instrument. . . (*Going*) Oh ! Parbleu ! Since you have a taste for trumpets I will go myself and order. . .

M. TURCARET (*stopping him*): I cannot allow this, Knight; I do not desire that for a trumpet. . . .

BARONESS (*aside to M. Turcaret*): Let him go, sir.

(*Knight goes*)

BARONESS: When we can be alone together for a few moments, spare us as much as possible the presence of such importunate creatures.

M. TURCARET: You love me more than I deserve, Madam.

BARONESS: Who would not love you? My cousin the Knight himself has always had an attachment for you. . . .

M. TURCARET (*interrupting*): I am much obliged to him.

BARONESS: An attention for everything that might please you. . . .

M. TURCARET (*interrupting*): He seems to me a very agreeable young man.

(*Enter Lisette*)

BARONESS: What is it, Lisette?

LISETTE: A man dressed in grey-black, with a dirty band and an old wig. . . (*Whispers*): It is the furniture for the country house.

BARONESS: Let him come in.

(*Enter M. Ferret and Frontin*)

M. FERRET (*to Baroness and Lisette*): Which of you ladies is the mistress here?

BARONESS: I am. What do you want?

M. FERRET: I shall not reply without previously giving myself the honour of saluting you, Madam, and all

this honourable company with all the respect owing and required.

M. TURCARET (*aside*) : An amusing eccentric.

LISETTE (*to M. Ferret*) : Without so much fuss, sir, tell us previously who you are.

M. FERRET (*to Lisette*) : I am a bailiff, at your service, and my name is M. Ferret.

BARONESS : A bailiff in my house !

FRONTIN : This is very insolent !

M. TURCARET (*to Baroness*) : Madam, shall I throw this scoundrel through the window ? He is not the first rascal who. . .

M. FERRET (*interrupting*) : Gently, sir ! Honest bailiffs like me are not liable to such adventures. I carry out my little office in so obliging a manner that all persons of quality find it a pleasure to receive a writ from my hand. (*Takes a paper from his pocket*) : Here is one, which, if you please, I shall have the honour—with your permission, sir—which I shall have the honour to present respectfully to Madam. . . under your favour, sir.

BARONESS : A writ to me ? . . . (*To Lisette*) : See what it is, Lisette.

LISETTE : Oh, Madam, I know nothing about it ; I can only read love-letters. . . (*To Frontin*) : You look, Frontin.

FRONTIN : I don't understand business, yet.

M. FERRET (*to Baroness*) : It is a bond which the deceased Baron Porcandorf,¹ your husband. . .

BARONESS (*interrupting*) : My late husband, sir ? This does not concern me ; I renounced my claim to the estate.

M. TURCARET : In that case they cannot demand anything from you.

M. FERRET : Pardon me, sir, the deed being signed by the lady. . .

¹ " Pigtown."

M. TURCARET (*interrupting*): The deed makes them jointly responsible?

M. FERRET: Yes, sir, jointly responsible, and there is a schedule of appropriation. . . I will read you the terms; they are set out in the writ.

M. TURCARET: Let us see if the deed is properly drawn.

M. FERRET (*having put on his spectacles*): "Before me and. . . were present in person a high and mighty lord George William Porcandorf and Dame Agnes Hildegond de la Dolinvillière his wife duly authorised by him to the effect of these presents by which they acknowledge they owe Eloi Jerome Poussif¹ horse merchant the sum of ten thousand livres. . ."

BARONESS: Ten thousand livres!

LISETTE: Accursed bond!

M. FERRET (*continuing*): "For an equipage furnished by the said Poussif consisting of twelve mules, fifteen bay Normandy horses, and three liveries of Auvergne, with all their manes, tails and ears and fitted with packs, saddles, bridles, halters. . . ."

LISETTE (*interrupting*): Bridles and halters! Is it for a woman to pay for such clothes?

M. TURCARET: Don't interrupt him. (*To M. Ferret*): Go on, my friend.

M. FERRET (*continuing*): "For the payment of the said ten thousand livres the said debtors have charged, set apart and mortgaged all their property now and hereafter without division or discussion renouncing the said rights and for the execution of these presents declare themselves domiciled with Innocent Blaise Le Juste formerly solicitor at the Châtelet dwelling in the Rue End-of-the-World. Made and passed, etc."

FRONTIN (*to M. Turcaret*): Is the deed properly drawn, sir?

¹ A "cheval poussif" is a "roarer."

M. TURCARET : I find nothing to complain of but the sum.

M. FERRET : But the sum, sir ! Oh ! there is nothing to object to in the sum, it is all set out.

M. TURCARET (*to Baroness*) : This is distressing.

BARONESS : How distressing ! Must it really cost me ten thousand livres because I signed ?

LISETTE : That is what comes of yielding too much to a husband. Will women never correct themselves of that fault ?

BARONESS : What injustice ! (*To M. Turcaret*) : Is there not a way of appealing against this deed, M. Turcaret ?

M. TURCARET : I see no chance. If by this deed you had not expressly renounced the rights of division and discussion, we might quibble with the said Poussif.

BARONESS : I must then make up my mind to pay since you condemn me, sir. I do not appeal against your decisions.

FRONTIN (*aside to M. Turcaret*) : How deferentially your opinions are received !

BARONESS (*to M. Turcaret*) : This will inconvenience me a little ; it will disturb my intentions with regard to a certain note to bearer you know of.

LISETTE : No matter ; let us pay, Madam ; don't let us undertake a law-suit against M. Turcaret's advice.

BARONESS : Heaven preserve me from it ! I would rather sell my jewels, my furniture !

FRONTIN (*aside to M. Turcaret*) : Sell her furniture, her jewels ; and for a husband's equipage, too ! Poor woman !

M. TURCARET (*to the Baroness*) : No, Madam, you will sell nothing. I will discharge this debt ; I make it my business.

BARONESS : You are jesting. I will use the note, I tell you.

M. TURCARET : You must keep it for a different purpose.

BARONESS : No, sir, no, the nobility of your behaviour embarrasses me more than the affair itself.

M. TURCARET : Let us speak no more of it, Madam ; I will go and attend to it at once.

FRONTIN : What a delicate soul ! . . . (*To M. Ferret*) : Follow us, sergeant ; you will be paid.

BARONESS (*to M. Turcaret*) : Don't be away long. Remember we are waiting for you.

M. TURCARET : I shall soon have finished this ; and then I shall return from business to pleasure.

(Goes, with Frontin and M. Ferret)

LISETTE : And we shall send you back from pleasure to business, take my word ! What clever rogues Frontin and M. Ferret are and what a good dupe M. Turcaret is !

BARONESS : It seems to me he is too much so, Lisette.

LISETTE : Indeed there is not much merit in catching him in a trap.

BARONESS : Do you know I begin to pity him ?

LISETTE : Death of my life ! No indiscreet pity ! Don't pity a man who pities nobody.

BARONESS : I feel scruples growing in spite of myself.

LISETTE : You must stifle them.

BARONESS : I find it difficult to conquer them.

LISETTE : It is not yet time to have them and it is better some day to feel remorse at having ruined a financier than regret at having missed the opportunity.

(Enter Jasmin)

JASMIN : Someone from Madam Dorimene.

BARONESS : Show them in.

(Jasmin goes)

BARONESS: She is sending to me to propose some pleasure party, no doubt, but. . . .

(Enter Madam Jacob)

MME JACOB: I beg your pardon, Madam, for the liberty I am taking. I deal in second-hand articles and my name is Madam Jacob. I have the honour sometimes to sell laces and all kinds of pomade to Madam Dorimene. I have just been to tell her I shall soon have a good bargain; but she is out of money and told me you might make use of it.

BARONESS: What is it?

MME JACOB: A head-dress worth fifteen hundred livres which a financier's wife¹ wants to sell. She has only worn it twice. The lady is tired of it, she thinks it is too common and wants to get rid of it.

BARONESS: I should not be sorry to see this head-dress.

MME JACOB: I will bring it to you as soon as I get it, Madam; I will let you have it cheap.

LISETTE: You will lose nothing; Madam is generous.

MME JACOB: It is not interest which directs me; and I have other talents, thank God, beside dealing in second-hand clothes.

BARONESS: I am convinced of it.

LISETTE *(to Mme Jacob)*: You look it.

MME JACOB: Ah! indeed, if I had no other means, how could I bring up my children as honestly as I do? I have a husband, it's true; but he only serves to increase the family without helping me to support it.

LISETTE: There are many husbands who do just the opposite.

BARONESS: And what do you do, Madam Jacob, to meet the expenses of your family by yourself?

¹ "Une fermière des regrats,"—"Wife of a furnisher of second-hand victuals."

MME JACOB: I make marriages, lady. It is true they are legitimate marriages; they don't bring in as much as the others; but, you see, I want to have nothing to reproach myself with.

LISETTE: That is well done.

MME JACOB: Four months ago I married a young musketeer to the widow of an accountant. A wonderful match! They keep open house every day; they are spending the accountant's money in the most agreeable way!

LISETTE: These two persons are well matched.

MME JACOB: Oh! All my marriages are happy. . .
(*To the Baroness*): And if Madam wanted to marry again, I have my hand on an excellent person.

BARONESS: For me, Madam Jacob?

MME JACOB: He is a gentleman from Limousin. An excellent husband! He would let his wife manage him like a Parisian.

LISETTE (*to Baroness*): This is another good bargain, Madam.

BARONESS: I do not feel disposed to profit by it; I do not want to marry so soon; I am not yet tired of the world.

LISETTE: Oh! Well, I am, Madam Jacob. Put me in your rate-book.

MME JACOB: I have what you want—a fat clerk who has some property but no patron; he is looking for a pretty wife to get him one.

LISETTE: Excellent proposal! That is what I want.

BARONESS (*to Mme Jacob*): You must be rich, Madam Jacob?

MME JACOB: Alas! Alas! I ought to cut a figure in Paris. . . I ought to ride in my carriage, lady, having a brother as I have in finance.

BARONESS: You have a brother in finance?

MME JACOB: And in important finance too! I am

M. Turcaret's sister, since I must tell you. . . Maybe you have heard him spoken of ?

BARONESS (*astonished*) : You are M. Turcaret's sister ?

MME JACOB : Yes, Madam, I am his sister by the father's side and mother's side too.

LISETTE (*also astonished*) . M. Turcaret is your brother, Madam Jacob ?

MME JACOB : Yes, my brother, my own brother ; and I am no nearer being a lady for all that. . . I see you are both very surprised. I suppose that is because he lets me take all the trouble I do ?

LISETTE : Ah ! Yes, that's the reason for our surprise.

MME JACOB : He does much worse things, the unnatural man ! He has forbidden me his house and he has not the heart even to employ my husband.

BARONESS : This calls for vengeance !

LISETTE : Ah ! What a bad brother !

MME JACOB : As bad a brother as he is husband. Did he not drive his wife out of the house ?

BARONESS : They were on bad terms ?

MME JACOB : They are so still, Madam ; they never have anything to do with each other ; and my sister-in-law is in the country.

BARONESS : What ! M. Turcaret is not a widower ?

MME JACOB : Why, he has been separated from his wife for ten years and pays her an allowance at Valognes to keep her from coming to Paris.

BARONESS (*aside*) : Lisette ?

LISETTE (*aside*) : Faith ! Madam, what a wicked man !

MME JACOB : Oh, Heaven will punish him sooner or later ; it cannot fail. I have heard it said already in one house that his affairs are going wrong.

BARONESS : His affairs going wrong ?

MME JACOB : Eh ! And how could it be otherwise ? He is an old fool who has always been in love with all

women except his own wife. He throws away money as soon as he is in love ; he is a money-sieve.

LISETTE (*aside*) : Whom is she telling that ? Who knows it better than we do ?

MME JACOB (*to Baroness*) : I don't know whom he is attached to at present ; but there are always some young women who pluck him, who entrap him ; and he thinks he entraps them because he promises to marry them. A great fool he is ! What do you say, Madam ?

BARONESS (*disconcerted*) : Yes, it is not altogether. . .

MME JACOB (*interrupting*) : Oh, I am very glad of it ! He deserves it, the wretch, he deserves it ! If I knew his mistress, I should go and advise her to pillage him, to devour him, to gnaw him, to destroy him ! (*To Lisette*) : Wouldn't you do the same, Mademoiselle ?

LISETTE : I should not fail to, Madam Jacob.

MME JACOB : I ask your pardon for troubling you with my griefs, but when I happen to think of them I feel them so much I cannot keep silent. . . Farewell, Madam ; as soon as I have the head-dress I shall not fail to bring it to you.

BARONESS : No need to hurry, Madam Jacob, no need to hurry.

(*Mme Jacob goes*)

BARONESS : Well, Lisette ?

LISETTE : Well, Madam ?

BARONESS : Would you have guessed M. Turcaret had a sister who sells second-hand effects ?

LISETTE : Would you have believed he had a wife in the country ?

BARONESS : The deceiver ! He has assured me he is a widower and I believed him.

LISETTE : Ah ! the old scoundrel ! . . . (*Seeing the Baroness pensive*) : But what is it ? . . . What's the matter with you ? . . . I see you are deeply grieved.

Mercy on my life ! You take it as seriously as if you were in love with M. Turcaret.

BARONESS : Although I don't love him, can I lose the hope of marrying him without feeling aggrieved ? The blackguard ! he has a wife ! I must break with him.

LISETTE : Yes ; but the interest of your fortune demands that you should ruin him first. Come, Madam, while we still hold him, attack his strong-box, seize his bank-notes ; let us sack M. Turcaret with fire and sword ; let us make him so wretched that one day he may be an object of pity even to his wife and become once more Madam Jacob's brother.

END OF ACT IV

ACT V

(*Lisette*)

LISETTE: This is an excellent house for Frontin and me! We have sixty pistoles already and we shall get perhaps as many more out of the joint deed. Courage! If we often make such little sums we shall end up with a reasonably large one.

(*Enter Baroness*)

BARONESS: It seems to me M. Turcaret ought to be back by now, Lisette.

LISETTE: Some fresh piece of business must have arisen . . . (*Seeing Flamand but not recognising him because he is not in livery*): But what does this gentleman want?

(*Enter Flamand*)

BARONESS (*to Lisette*): Why do they let people in without announcing them?

FLAMAND: There is no harm in it, Madam, it's only me.

LISETTE (*recognising Flamand, to Baroness*): Eh! It's Flamand, Madam! Flamand out of livery! Flamand with a sword at his side! What a change!

FLAMAND: Softly, Mademoiselle, softly! I must not be called just Flamand, if you please. I am no longer M. Turcaret's lackey, no; he has just given me a good

post, yes. I am in business now, ah ! and I must be called M. Flamand now, you understand ?

LISETTE : You are right, M. Flamand ; since you have become a clerk you must no longer be treated as a lackey.

FLAMAND (*pointing to the Baroness*) : I owe it to Madam and I have come here on purpose to thank her. She is a good lady who has been very kind to get me a good commissioner's post which will be worth a hundred good crowns a year to me and which is in a good district too ; it is at Falaise, which is such a good town, where the people are so good, they say.

LISETTE : There is plenty of good in all that, M. Flamand.

FLAMAND : I am captain-warder of the Guibrai gate. I shall have the keys and I shall be able to let in and out whom I please. I have been told that is a good privilege.

LISETTE : Peste !

FLAMAND : Oh ! And the best of it is this post always brings good luck to those who have it ; they all get rich. M. Turcaret began with it, they say.

BARONESS : It must be very gratifying to you, M. Flamand, to follow in your master's steps.

LISETTE : And we exhort you, for your own good, to be honest like him.

FLAMAND (*to Baroness*) : I shall send you little presents from time to time, Madam.

BARONESS : No, my dear Flamand ; I ask nothing of you.

FLAMAND : Oh, but yes ! I know how clerks must behave to the ladies who find them posts ; the only thing I am afraid of is that I may be dismissed ; commissioners are very liable to it, you see.

LISETTE : That is disagreeable.

FLAMAND (*to Baroness*) : For instance, the clerk who was dismissed to-day for me to take his place got this post through a certain lady whom M. Turcaret loved, but

does not love any longer. Take great care, Madam, not to have me dismissed in this way.

BARONESS: I shall give it all my attention, M. Flamand.

FLAMAND: I beg you will always please M. Turcaret, Madam.

BARONESS: I shall do all I can, since you are interested in the matter.

FLAMAND (*approaching the Baroness*): Always put on this fine rouge to strike his eye.

LISETTE (*repulsing him*): Come, captain-warder, you must go to your Guibrai gate. We know what we have to do. . . Yes. . . We don't need your advice. . . No. You will never be anything but a fool. You may take it from me. There! Do you understand?

(*Flamand goes*)

BARONESS: That young man is the greatest simpleton. . .

LISETTE (*interrupting*): Yet he has been a lackey long enough; that ought to have enlightened him.

(*Enter Jasmin*)

JASMIN: The Marquess is here, Madam, with a tall fat lady.

(*Goes*)

BARONESS: This is his fair conquest. I am curious to see her.

LISETTE: I am no less eager—I have an amusing anticipation of what she will be.

(*Enter the Marquess and Madam Turcaret*)

MARQUESS (*to Baroness*): I have come, charming

Baroness, to introduce to you an amiable lady, the most witty, most complaisant, the most entertaining person. . . So many good qualities common to you both ought to attach you to each other in friendship.

BARONESS : I am very much inclined to this friendship. . . (*aside to Lisette*) : She is the original of the portrait sacrificed to me by the Knight.

MME TURCARET : I fear, Madam, that you will soon lose these fine sentiments. A person of fashionable, of brilliant society, like yourself, will find little pleasure in the society of a provincial.

BARONESS : Your appearance is not provincial, Madam ; and the manners of our most fashionable ladies are no more agreeable than yours.

MARQUESS (*indicating Mme Turcaret*) : Ah ! Palsambleu ! No ! I understand these matters, Madam ; and when you see that figure and that face you will agree with me that I have the best taste of any gentleman in France.

MME TURCARET : You are too polite, Marquess. These flatteries might fit me in the country where—be it said without vanity—I shine a little. I am always on the lookout for new fashions ; they are sent to me as soon as they are invented and I can boast I was the first in the town of Valognes to wear flounces.

LISETTE (*aside*) : What a fool !

BARONESS : It is delightful to serve as model to such a town.

MME TURCARET : I have put it on such a footing ! I have made a little Paris of it with the young people I attract there.

MARQUESS (*ironically*) : What ! a little Paris ! Don't you know it takes three months of Valognes to finish off a courtier ?

MME TURCARET (*to Baroness*) : Oh ! I don't live like a provincial woman. I don't keep myself shut up at home ; I am too much fitted for society. I remain in the town

and I dare to say that my house is a school of politeness and gallantry for the young.

LISETTE : It is a sort of college for all lower Normandy.

MME TURCARET (*to Baroness*) : There is gambling at my house ; people gather there for scandal ; we read all the works of wit produced in Cherbourg, Saint-Lô, Coutances, which are better than those of Vire and Caen. I sometimes give *fêtes galantes* and supper collations. Our cooks indeed do not understand how to make a *râgout* ; but they roast meats so skilfully that one turn more or less of the spit and they would be ruined.

MARQUESS : It is the essential of a good dinner. . . Faith, long live Valognes for its roast meats !

MME TURCARET : As for balls, we often give them. How we enjoy ourselves ! Everything is so neat and clean ! The ladies of Valognes are the first in the world in their knowledge of the art of masking well and each has her favourite disguise. Guess which mine is.

LISETTE : Madam disguises herself as Love, perhaps ?

MME TURCARET : Ah, no ! Not that !

BARONESS : You appear as a goddess, I suppose, one of the Graces ?

MME TURCARET : As Venus, my dear, as Venus.

MARQUESS (*ironically*) : As Venus ! Ah ! Madam, how well you disguise yourself !

LISETTE (*aside*) : It could not be a greater disguise.

(*Enter Knight*)

KNIGHT (*to Baroness*) : Madam, we shall soon have the most delightful concert. . . (*Sees Madam Turcaret, and aside*) : What do I see ?

MME TURCARET (*aside*) : O Heaven !

BARONESS (*aside to Lisette*) : Just as I thought.

KNIGHT (*to Baroness*) : Is this the lady you spoke of, Marquess ?

MARQUESS: Yes, she is my countess. Why this surprise?

KNIGHT: Oh! Parbleu! I didn't expect her.

MME TURCARET (*aside*): What a mishap!

MARQUESS (*to Knight*): Explain yourself, Knight. Do you know my countess?

KNIGHT: Beyond any doubt; I have been in communication with her these eight days.

MARQUESS: What's this I hear? Ah! The faithless, ungrateful creature!

KNIGHT: And this morning even she had the kindness to send me her portrait.

MARQUESS: The devil she did! Has she portraits to give to everybody?

(*Enter Mme Jacob*)

MME JACOB (*to Baroness*): Madam, I have brought you the head-dress I promised to show you.

BARONESS: What a bad time you have chosen, Madam Jacob. You see I have guests.

MME JACOB: I ask your pardon, Madam; I will come another time. . . (*Perceives Mme Turcaret*): But—what is this I see? My sister-in-law here! Madam Turcaret!

KNIGHT: Madam Turcaret!

BARONESS (*to Mme Jacob*): Madam Turcaret!

LISSETTE (*as above*): Madam Turcaret!

MARQUESS (*aside*): What an amusing incident!

MME JACOB (*to Mme Turcaret*): And by what chance, Madam, do I meet you in this house?

MME TURCARET (*aside*): I must outface her. . . (*To Mme Jacob*): I don't know you, my good woman.

MME JACOB: You don't know Madam Jacob? . . . Trédame! Is it because you have been separated from my brother these ten years since he could not live with you, that you pretend not to know me?

MARQUESS : What are you thinking of, Madam Jacob ? Do you know you are speaking to a countess ?

MME JACOB : To a countess ! Eh ! and where is her estate situated, if you please ? Ah ! indeed, I like her big airs !

MME TURCARET : You are insolent, my dear. . .

MME JACOB : Insolent ! I ! I am insolent ! . . . God's light ! Don't meddle with that ! If it's a matter of exchanging insults, I shall come out of it as well as you.

MME TURCARET : Oh ! I have no doubt of it. The daughter of a blacksmith of Domfront could not be out-done in abuse.

MME JACOB : The daughter of a blacksmith ! Pardi ! She's a very mighty lady to twit me with my birth ! You seem to have forgotten that M. Briochais,¹ your father, was a pastry-cook in the town of Falaise. Come, my lady countess, since you are a countess, we know each other. . . My brother will laugh heartily when he knows you have assumed this burlesque name to come gadding about Paris. I wish for my own pleasure he would come here now.

KNIGHT : You may have that pleasure, Madam. We are awaiting M. Turcaret for supper.

MME TURCARET (*aside*) : Ah !

MARQUESS (*to Mme Jacob*) : You will take supper with us too, Madam Jacob ; I adore family suppers.

MME TURCARET : I am very sorry I ever set foot in this house.

LISETTE (*aside*) : I believe you.

MME TURCARET (*going*) : I shall leave at once.

MARQUESS (*stopping her*) : You will not go, if you please, until you have seen M. Turcaret.

MME TURCARET : Don't stop me, Marquess, don't stop me.

¹ A " brioche " is a kind of roll.

MARQUESS : Palsambleu ! Mademoiselle Briochais, you shall not go ; that is certain.

KNIGHT : Eh ! Let her go, Marquess.

MARQUESS : I shall do nothing of the kind. To punish her for having deceived us both I'll set her and her husband by the ears.

BARONESS : No, Marquess ; please let her go.

MARQUESS : Wasted request ; all I can do for you, Madam, is to allow her to disguise herself as Venus, so that her husband will not recognise her.

LISETTE (*looking out*) : Ah ! Faith ! Here comes M. Turcaret !

MME JACOB (*aside*) : I am delighted.

MME TURCARET (*aside*) : Unfortunate day !

BARONESS (*aside*) : Why must this scene take place in my house ?

MARQUESS (*aside*) : I am at the summit of joy !

(*Enter M. Turcaret*)

M. TURCARET (*to Baroness*) : I have sent the bailiff away, Madam, and finished. . . (*Aside, seeing his sister*) : Ah ! Can I believe my eyes ! My sister here ! . . . (*Perceiving his wife*) : And, what is worse, my wife !

MARQUESS : You are among old acquaintances here, M. Turcaret. . . (*Indicating Mme Turcaret*) : You see a fair countess whose chains I wear : shall I introduce you to her, not forgetting Madam Jacob ?

MME JACOB : Ah ! brother !

M. TURCARET : Ah ! sister ! Who the devil brought them here ?

MARQUESS : It was I, M. Turcaret ; you owe it to me ; Embrace these two cherished persons. . . Ah ! How moved he is ! I wonder at the power of blood and conjugal love !

M. TURCARET : I dare not look at her ; I think I see my evil genius.

MME TURCARET (*aside*): I cannot look at him without horror.

MARQUESS: Affectionate couple! Put no restraint on yourselves; give free vent to all the joy you must feel at seeing each other after ten years separation!

BARONESS (*to M. Turcaret*): You did not expect to meet Madam Turcaret here, sir; and I can imagine your embarrassment. But why did you tell me you were a widower?

MARQUESS: He told you he was a widower? Eh! parbleu! his wife told me she was a widow! They both have a mania for being widowed.

BARONESS (*to M. Turcaret*): Speak out—why did you deceive me?

M. TURCARET (*disconcerted*): I thought, Madam. . . that by making you think that . . . I thought I was a widower . . . You would think that. . . I had no wife. . . (*Aside*): My mind is disturbed—I hardly know what I am saying.

BARONESS: I guess your thought, sir, and I forgive you a deceit which you thought necessary to secure yourself a hearing from me. I will even go further; instead of upbraiding you I want to reconcile you with Mme Turcaret.

M. TURCARET: Who? Me, Madam? Oh, no, not that! You don't know her; she is a demon. I would rather live with the wife of the Grand Mogul.

MME TURCARET: Don't excuse yourself so violently, sir! I have no more desire for it than you; and I should never have come to Paris to trouble your pleasures if you had been more regular in paying the allowance you make me to keep in the country.

MARQUESS (*to M. Turcaret*): To keep her in the country! . . . Ah! M. Turcaret, you are very wrong; Madam Turcaret deserves to have her allowance paid quarterly in advance.

MME TURCARET : There are five quarters due me. If he does not give them to me, I shall not go, I shall stay in Paris to anger him. I will go to his mistresses' houses and make a disturbance. . . And I shall begin with this house, I warn you.

M. TURCARET (*aside*) : Insolence !

LISETTE (*aside*) : This conversation will end badly.

BARONESS (*to Mme Turcaret*) : You insult me, Madam.

MME TURCARET : I have eyes, thank God, I have eyes : I can see everything that is going on in this house. My husband is the greatest dupe. . .

M. TURCARET : What impudence ! Ah ! ventrebleu ! You jade ! But for the respect I have for the company. . .

MARQUESS : Don't let us hinder you, M. Turcaret. You are with your friends ; behave freely with them.

KNIGHT (*to M. Turcaret, interposing between him and his wife*) : Sir. . .

BARONESS (*to Mme Turcaret*) : Remember you are in my house.

(*Enter Jasmin*)

JASMIN (*to M. Turcaret*) : A coach has just stopped at the door with two gentlemen who say they are your partners ; they wish to speak to you about an important piece of business.

(*Goes*)

M. TURCARET (*to Mme Turcaret*) : Ah ! I shall return . . . I shall teach you, impudent creature, to respect a house. . .

MME TURCARET (*interrupting*) : I am not afraid of your threats.

(*M. Turcaret goes*)

KNIGHT (*to Mme Turcaret*) : Calm your agitation, Madam ; let M. Turcaret find you tranquillised.

MME TURCARET : Oh ! All his outbursts don't frighten me. .

BARONESS : We will soothe him in your favour.

MME TURCARET : I understand you, Madam. You wish to reconcile me with my husband, so that out of gratitude I shall permit him to continue his attentions to you.

BARONESS : You are blinded by your anger. My only object is the re-union of your hearts ; I give up M. Turcaret to you ; I never want to see him again in my life.

MME TURCARET : That is too generous.

MARQUESS (*to Knight*) : Since the Baroness renounces the husband, for my part I give up the wife. Come, Knight, renounce her too. It is good to conquer self !

(*Enter Frontin*)

FRONTIN (*aside*) : O unforeseen misfortune ! O cruel mishap !

KNIGHT : What is it, Frontin ?

FRONTIN : M. Turcaret's partners have put the bailiffs in his house, for a sum of two hundred thousand crowns they have lost through a pay-officer whom he guaranteed. . . I came here at top speed, to warn him to escape ; but I came too late ; his creditors have already secured his person.

MME JACOB : My brother in the hands of his creditors ! . . . Unnatural though he is, I feel touched by his misfortunes. I will use all my credit on his behalf ; I cannot forget I am his sister.

(*Goes*)

MME TURCARET : And I will go to him and overwhelm him with insults—I cannot forget I am his wife.

(*Goes*)

FRONTIN (*to the Knight*) : We looked for the pleasure of ruining him ; but Justice was jealous of our pleasure and anticipated us.

MARQUESS : Ah, well ! he has plenty of money to get out of the difficulty.

FRONTIN : I doubt it. They say he has madly wasted immense sums. . . But that is not what troubles me at present ; what distresses me is that I was there when his partners arrived with the bailiffs.

KNIGHT : Well ?

FRONTIN : Well ! sir, they arrested and searched me, to see if I had been entrusted with any paper which might be used to the profit of the creditors. . . (*Indicating Baroness*) : At all events, they confiscated the note belonging to Madam which you entrusted to me.

KNIGHT : What do I hear ? Just Heaven !

FRONTIN : And they took from me another of ten thousand francs which M. Turcaret gave me for the joint deed and which M. Ferret had just returned to me.

KNIGHT : Ah ! and why didn't you say you were in my service, scoundrel ?

FRONTIN : Oh ! Indeed, sir, I did not fail to ; I said I belonged to a Knight but when they saw the notes they refused to believe me.

KNIGHT : I cannot contain myself ; I am in despair !

BARONESS : And my eyes are opened. You told me you had the money for my note in your house. I see by that my diamond was never pawned, and I know what to think of the fine tale Frontin told me of your outburst yesterday evening ! Ah ! Knight, I shouldn't have thought you capable of such behaviour. . . (*Looking at Lisette*) : I dismissed Marine because she was not in your interests and I dismiss Lisette because she is. . .

Good-bye ; I never want to hear you spoken of again.

(*Retires into her apartment*)

MARQUESS (*laughing, to Knight who appears very disconcerted*) : Ha ! Ha ! Faith, Knight, you make me laugh. Your consternation amuses me. . . Come and sup at a restaurant and let us spend the night drinking.

FRONTIN (*to Knight*) : Shall I follow you, sir ?

KNIGHT : No ; I discharge you. Never show yourself in my sight again.

(Goes with the Marquess)

LISETTE : And what course are we to take, Frontin ?

FRONTIN : I have one to propose to you. Long live wit, my child ! I have just played a bold stroke—I was not searched.

LISETTE : You have the notes ?

FRONTIN : I have cashed them and the money is safe ; I have forty thousand francs. If your ambition can rest satisfied with that little sum, we will create a stock of honest children.

LISETTE : I consent.

FRONTIN : M. Turcaret's reign is now over and mine begins.

END OF ACT V



[Face p. 190.]

PIERRE CARLET DE CHAMBERLAIN DE MARIVAUX.

After a painting by Aug. St. Aubin.

Engraved by Ingouf, Junr., 1781. Ornaments by C. P. Marillier.



PIERRE CARLET DE CHAMBLAIN DE MARIVAUD

I

Marivaux, one of the most complex, delicate and interesting characters of the 18th century, lived a life almost devoid of episodes. It is striking to see how few actions appear in his biographies and how large a bulk of writing goes to analysis and discussion of his temperament and work. He is the antithesis of Rengard, whose comedies of farcical action long overshadowed his comedies of delicate sentiment, until in the aesthetic days of the last century, Marivaux was triumphantly revived. Still, like the other authors represented in this volume, he comes within Oscar Wilde's definition of a classic.

Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux was born in the parish of Saint-Gervais, Paris, on the 4th February, 1688. His father came from an old legal family in Normandy, and added "de Marivaux" to his name to distinguish himself from other men of business named de Chamblain. He was made Director of the Mint at Rioum, where young Pierre spent his childhood; he was also at Limoges. Nothing further is known about Marivaux until he was seventeen, when he wrote a one-act comedy in verse (printed 1712) to win a bet. His education is said to have been "*belle*", but he never knew Greek, rather disliked and misunderstood the classics, and was a strong supporter of the "Moderns" in that famous and inept battle of the books. About the age of seventeen he met with an adventure which affected his life deeply; he

has related it himself in the first number of the *Spectateur Français*. He fell in love with a pretty girl, whose natural manners and unaffected vivacity delighted and charmed him and made him hope very much to marry her. One day they had been taking a meal in a country inn ; Marivaux said good-bye, went off, and then remembered he had left his gloves on the table. As he re-entered the room he saw this " natural " girl practising in front of the mirror the smiles and other arts she had been using to captivate the rich young man. The sensitive Marivaux was revolted and, in his indignation, harsh ; " Mademoiselle ", said he, " I have just seen the machinery behind the Opera ; it will always amuse me, but will move me less." His " misanthropy ", by which he meant not so much unsociability as distrust of peoples' appearances, dates, he asserts, from this episode.

Marivaux was very slow in finding his talent. Until he was thirty-four he had plenty of money and lived an existence of cultivated idleness. He was very friendly with Fontenelle and La Motte, both strong partisans of the " Moderns." He frequented the *salons* of the Marquises de Lambert and de Tencin. The society of those who visited the Marquise de Lambert particularly pleased him by the witty gaiety, the good manners, the delicacy of sentiment which were a reaction against the grossness and cynicism of other groups. The " philosophes," who were to make the world perfect by destroying everything they could not understand, sneered at what they called " lambertinage ", but Marivaux was of a finer grain. The Marquise de Tencin is chiefly remembered because she abandoned her child on the steps of a church ; the baby was taken care of by a poor man—as in romances—and eventually became known to the world as M. d'Alembert. For some reason the circle into which Marivaux drifted when he first came to Paris was anxious to satirize romance ; to please his anti-romantic friends he wrote

Pharsamon (1712), a bad imitation of Cervantes; *Les Aventures de * * ** (1713), and a third burlesque novel *Le Voiture Embourbé* which stuck in the mud so effectually it never reached an end. The first work which attracted attention to Marivaux was a pamphlet satirizing the contemporary craze for playing at cup and ball. In 1717 he began to write for the *Mercure*, then edited by an ardent champion of the moderns, the Abbé Buchet. He contributed some successful sketches to the *Mercure* but with characteristic modesty protested when the Abbé-editor described him as a "new Theophrastus". In the same year (1717) he published his travesty of the Iliad, which no living person has ever been able to read—any more than Marivaux was able to read Homer.

It was not until 1720, when he was about thirty-two, that Marivaux discovered his own talent and scored a success; even so he had two other failures in the same year. In 1719 he had published in the *Mercure* some *Pensées* of average merit; on the 4th March, 1720, a three-act comedy, *L'Amour et la Vérité* (Italiens) was a failure; on the 19th October of the same year, a tragedy *Annibal* (Français) was a failure; but the next night a one-act comedy *Arlequin Poli par l'Amour* (Italiens) was successful and ran for twelve nights. The Italian actors are an interesting factor in Marivaux's dramatic career. In the first place Marivaux's genius for comedy is hardly what one would call "essentially French"; its sentiment is too tender and subtle, its method too flexible and free from pedantry. On the other hand his best qualities were rather more of an Italian kind and it is not surprising to learn that the Italian players liked Marivaux's comedies more than the troupe of the "Comédie Française" and that the audience at the "Italiens" was nearly always more sympathetic to him. Regnard who began with the "Italiens" was obviously a "Comédie Française" author and scored his great successes with the latter; Lesage

wanted freedom and became the chief supporter of the "Théâtre de la Foire"; but Marivaux was made for the "Italiens" and they for him. And then there was Silvia.

"Silvia" was Gianetta Rose Guyonne Benozzi, born in 1700, and one of the principal actresses of the Italiens. She was beautiful, and she was charming and intelligent. Her playing was spontaneous and natural; she had not been spoilt by the training of theatre "experts"; and the delicacy of her temperament made her excel in parts which called for subtle delineation of character. Silvia played in Marivaux's second successful comedy, *La Surprise de l'Amour* (3 May, 1722) and complained that she had been unable to bring out all the *nuances* of the piece because the author had not read it to her. It is said that Marivaux came into her dressing-room while she was making this complaint, picked up the book and read a scene in his inimitable way, which caused Silvia to exclaim he was the author or the devil. They became great friends and all the "Silvia" parts in his plays were written for her. Although it was generally thought a greater achievement to get a play on at the "Comédie Française" than with the "Italiens," Marivaux distinctly showed where his preference lay by giving nineteen pieces to the "Italiens" and only ten to the "Français". It is typical of Marivaux's delicate feelings that he has never been accused by his worst enemies of any *liaison* with Silvia, which would have been almost the normal relationship; for she was married to a jealous husband (who once beat her so hard that she miscarried of twins) and she was not wholly "cruel", we hear.

The years 1721-23 were important in Marivaux's life. In 1721 he married a delightful and simple girl with whom he was very much in love and by whom he had one daughter. In 1722 some busybody friends persuaded him to put all his money into Law's "Mississippi Scheme"—the French equivalent of the "South Sea Bubble." For

a time his fortune was doubled, but when the crash came he lost everything—and to add a far worse and irreparable blow, Mme de Marivaux died in 1723, “mourned by her husband all his life”. The magnanimity of Marivaux is certainly inspiring. He had been brought up in comparative wealth and had enjoyed an ample income until he was thirty-four; he was left a widower, penniless, with a baby daughter to look after, and no means of support but his pen. He never once reproached the foolish friends who had lost his money for him, though they had practically forced him into speculation against his will. He never complained. He scarcely ever answered the numerous malignant and crassly stupid attacks on his work, nor allowed himself to be goaded into protesting against the “cabal” working against the success of his comedies—which meant his living. And he was neither phlegmatic, lacking in courage, nor incapable of polemics. His sensitiveness was almost proverbial and his quickness to take offence remarkable; but he thought literature should not be sullied with squabbles and refrained from reply with a tranquillity which showed how far he was from the petulant vanity of the “*écrivassier*”. Only once he allowed himself to retort. He was sincerely religious and his moral as well as his aesthetic delicacy was revolted by the hard lubricity of Crébillon fils, who sneered at him in the *Sofa*. Marivaux replied with a denunciation which is a masterpiece in its *genre*.

After the loss of his money Marivaux set to work with a gentle determination to earn his living by his pen; but his natural indolence added to his genuine talents and his incapacity for intrigue seriously handicapped him in this always chimerical project. Fortunately, Madame de Pompadour later on secured him a pension of three thousand livres; and Helvétius, whom he had befriended as a young man, is said to have helped him. With characteristic delicacy, Marivaux had not allowed the first year of

his married life to be clouded by literary labours and so the loss of his money found him without any comedy on hand. He turned to journalism and brought out a French imitation of Addison and Steele under the title of *Le Spectateur Français*, but though this periodical was well written and can be read with profit to-day the irregularity of its appearance proved fatal; it was to have been published every week, but the twenty-five numbers which were written took two years to appear. On the 6th April, 1723, *La Double Inconstance* (Italiens) was produced; this is the earliest of his plays which are still read and played in France. Thereafter he produced comedies in fairly rapid succession, both with the "Italiens" and the "Français" down to 1746. The best remembered of these are *Le Jeu de l'Amour et du Hasard* (1730), *L'Ecole des Mères* (1732), *Le Legs* (1736), *Les Fausses Confidences* (1737), *Les Sincères* (1739), and *L'Epreuve* (1740); all except *Le Legs* first performed by the "Italiens". Marivaux had many enemies as a dramatist. The distinction of his manners, the fact that he had been rich, the fineness of his sentiment and character-drawing, the fact that he avoided the cynicism, grossness and irreligion of the "philosophes"—all created a formidable cabal against him. M. de Voltaire was very much his enemy; so when Marivaux was offered a considerable sum to write a pamphlet against Voltaire at a critical moment in that gentleman's career, he must have been surprised at the crude flattery by which Voltaire tried to disarm him. But Marivaux had already refused to write the pamphlet. At no time was he ever certain of his audience; and the fulsome sentimentality of the "drame bourgeois" pleased the later generation into which he lived more than his subtle character studies.

In 1731 he began the publication in parts of *Marianne*, his long novel, which lasted until 1741 and even then was not finished. The novel related at great length

and with extraordinary detail the adventures of Marianne, in a style which has considerable charm in its leisurely unfolding of events and motives. This was a genuine contribution to the developement of the novel and its relation to *Pamela* is undoubtedly that of a forerunner. He published another novel, *Le Paysan Parvenu* in 1735, while the year before he had issued eleven numbers of another periodical, *Le Cabinet du Philosophe*. In 1742 he was elected to the *Académie*, in opposition to Voltaire. Mme de Tencin did for Marivaux what he was incapable of doing for himself ; she visited, she intrigued, she cajoled, she petitioned and triumphantly landed her protégé into that aggregation of mediocrities. He was welcomed by an Archbishop¹ who had never been to the theatre and therefore had to praise his colleague "by hearsay". Marivaux took his academic functions seriously, was assiduous in his attendance and on hot August afternoons read to the despairing Academy long effusions on the progress of the human mind or the ancient Persians. In revenge the Academy made him their emissary when great personages of state had to be congratulated on a fortunate death in the family or the happy issue of some intrigue.

Towards the end of his life Marivaux, who must have been lonely since his daughter had entered a convent, formed a curious but touching relationship with a charming old maid, Mlle. de Saint-Jean. To marry would have exposed them to ridicule ; their age placed them above considerations of scandal and so Marivaux went to live in Mlle. de Saint-Jean's sunny apartment in the Rue de Richelieu. In October, 1757, they made an agreement by which they mutually gave each other all their property, and in this agreeable but not senile companionship Marivaux

¹ See Vol. V. of Marivaux's *Oeuvres*, 1781. The "discours" of the Archbishop of Sens is a singular mixture of ineptitude and insult, conveyed with exquisite politeness and in perfect prose.

passed the end of his life. His last published work was a letter in verse to a lady whose parrot had died. That was in 1757 ; he lived on until the 12th February, 1763, when he departed this life almost unperceived by his literary colleagues, leaving to Mlle. de Saint-Jean his tiny fortune, his debts and his poor pensioners.

The character of Marivaux both as an individual and as a writer has attracted much attention and the critical and descriptive articles and studies of him are very numerous. He was a really estimable man, with the good qualities of his age and few of its defects. He was philosophical without being pedantic or brutal and in good and bad fortune showed the equability of his temperament and the firmness of his self-control. As he never abused his wealth, so he never complained at his poverty. He was sensitive without being mawkish ; he enjoyed the society of women without becoming a *petit-maitre* ; and his delicacy, his respect, his sympathy with feminine subtleties made him friends of some of the most distinguished women of his time. He practised authorship at first for pleasure, afterwards for subsistence ; but in the first period he never tried to purchase praise, in the second he never stooped to the arts of literary success. He loved his wife, mourned for her and never re-married. In an age of drunkenness, he was sober ; in a time of sexual license, he was decent ; in an age of social selfishness, he was compassionate and charitable beyond his means. The worst that is said of him is that he was quick to take offence, that he was indolent, that he was a trifler and a lady's man, that he " ran after wit " and was " metaphysical." These are not serious crimes. Modern students of Marivaux have always recognised in him a sincere and sensitive intelligence which was not fully appreciated by the mass of contemporaries, because it was, and probably always will remain, too delicate for the average mind to estimate at its full value.

Marivaux interests us as a precursor, who clung to his originality with a polite obstinacy in spite of the criticism of those who object to originality—which includes most people. In the drama he rebelled against the classic French farce, ejected obscenities and horse-play, introduced the comedy of fine sentiment and psychological *finesse*. In the novel he preceded Richardson and partly created a new *genre*; the novel of adventures combined with sentimental analysis. In journalism he introduced to France the discursive "Spectator" essay. He gave French literary criticism a new term, "marivaudage", invented to describe his peculiarly personal style, which is a figurative and "quintessential" use of language to express delicate shades of feeling and sentiment. Time has somewhat antiquated his *finesses*, and in the contemporary cult for brutality and ruthless excitement he has receded from the high esteem he reached some forty years ago. He will be remembered as an honest man, a delicate observer, a fine craftsman and a clever builder of comedies of sentiment.

II

THE GAME OF LOVE AND CHANCE

The contrast between this and the two preceding plays will strike the reader at once. Marivaux always professed a dislike for Molière and his object was to create a new kind of comedy. Here there is no horse-play, no coarseness, no cloacal jests, nothing *risqué* even; all is polite and delicate. The main device of the play, the simultaneous disguises of Dorante and Silvia, is wildly improbable; but the "Italiens" allowed even greater liberties in improbability than the "Français"; and it will be remembered that Arlequin was always dressed in the

Harlequin costume and wore a black masque. The reader must accept these conventions—as Marivaux and his audience did—and direct attention to the subtle play of character, the gradual unfolding of amorous “inclination” and its triumph over the obstacles of “rank and fortune”. As Mario says, it is “charming” for Silvia to be loved by Dorante while disguised as a serving maid. And of course this “marriage of inclination” was a protest against the aristocratic “marriage of convenience” and the cynical immorality which was its natural result. Marivaux was a “*grand voluptueux*” and none knew better than he that in love “*volupté*” is as much a matter of the heart as of the senses, that nothing is more fatal to the pleasures of sex than grossness, cynicism and promiscuity. Marivaux’s is scarcely so much a moralist’s protest against license, as a wise man’s protest against excess. The prudishness of Steele is unknown to him, but as the French never fell into the coarseness of a Wycherley he had less reason for it; there is something in the English character which is essentially brutal and makes it impossible that Burke’s phrase about vice losing half its evil by losing all its grossness could ever have been applied to the English.

Conforming to the tradition of the “*Italiens*”, Marivaux’s play is in three acts only; it observes the unity of place which is frequently broken in the plays given by the troupe before 1697. The first scene between Lisette and Silvia is too discursive and moralising; it contains two or three of those “portraits” which obtained for Marivaux the title of “the new Theophrastus”. The attitude of M. Orgon in the next scene is a complete overturning of the conventional father of comedy, the “barbon” of Molière. He allows his daughter to decide whether the man selected as her future husband pleases her or not and he holds the opinion—which might have served as an epitaph to Marivaux—that in this world to be kind

enough we must be a little too kind. The weakness of the double disguise has already been touched upon. The sixth scene, which is a good one, is rather clumsy in English because we have no "tutoiement". The seventh scene, between the disguised Silvia and Dorante gives of course the opportunity for a brilliant display of "mari-vaudage"; and Marivaux's Arlequin is amusing without horse-play and yet remains in the old Arlequin tradition. The last scene between Orgon and Arlequin, with the disguised Dorante as an agonised witness, must have been delightful with a good actor as Arlequin.

The second act brings us at once to those sentimental complications beloved of Marivaux. Lisette, disguised as Silvia, finds Arlequin, disguised as Dorante, in love with her; Dorante disguised as his own servant finds himself falling in love with the disguised Silvia and Silvia takes an undue interest in the valet. All these disguises are a little bewildering and it is somewhat remarkable that none of the four has the slightest suspicion of what is taking place. Arlequin's bad manners are not so apparent in 20th century English as in 18th century French; the reader must continually recollect the extreme importance attached to fine distinctions of manners in the 18th century. The Arlequin-Lisette scenes are distinctly less funny in English, and the subtle way in which Lisette provokes Silvia is more than half lost because here, as so often, the art of Marivaux lies in a delicate use of words whose virtue vanishes in translation. The love scene between Silvia and Dorante is a masterpiece of "mari-vaudage", and the gentle teasing of Silvia by her father and brother afterwards is in Marivaux's best vein. The revelation of his identity by Dorante at the end of this act virtually ends the suspense of the play; it is only prolonged plausibly by a series of more or less clever devices.

We open Act III knowing that Dorante is certain to

be captured by Silvia. However, there is the Arlequin-Lisette affair to be settled and Dorante is to be forced to "sacrifice reason to love" and to ask the lady's-maid to marry him; Mario is sent to pique his jealousy. The Arlequin-Lisette confession of identity passes off with a little mutual abuse; and then, as the *dénouement*, Dorante is at last brought to offer marriage to the girl he thinks is Lisette.

THE GAME OF LOVE AND CHANCE

COMEDY BY PIERRE CARLET DE CHAMBLAIN
DE MARIVAUX

Played for the first time by the
King's Italian Comedians, the 23rd January, 1730

PERSONS

M. ORGON

MARIO

SILVIA

DORANTE

LISETTE

Silvia's maid

ARLEQUIN

Dorante's valet

A. LACKEY

SCENE :

Paris. In Orgon's house

THE GAME OF LOVE AND CHANCE

ACT I

(Silvia and Lisette)

SILVIA: But, once more, what right had you to meddle? Why did you answer for my feelings?

LISETTE: Because I thought your feelings on this occasion would be like those of anyone else. Your father asked me if you are glad that he is marrying you, if it makes you happy. And I replied: "Yes". It came out immediately. You are perhaps the only woman living for whom that "yes" would not be true. "No" is unnatural.

SILVIA: "No" is unnatural? What silly childishness! Marriage must have great attractions for you?

LISETTE: Well, that is another case for "Yes".

SILVIA: Hush! Take your sauciness elsewhere and remember that it is not for you to judge of my heart by your own.

LISETTE: My heart is made like everyone's. How did yours contrive to be made like no one else's?

SILVIA: Upon my word, if she dared, she would call me an eccentric.

LISETTE: If I were your equal, we should see.

SILVIA: You are trying to anger me, Lisette.

LISETTE: Not purposely. But frankly now, what real harm did I do by telling Monsieur Orgon that you were glad to be married?

SILVIA : First, what you said was not true ; I am not tired of being unmarried.

LISETTE : This is another novelty.

SILVIA : And it is not necessary for my father to think he is pleasing me so much by marrying me, because that makes him act with a self-confidence which may after all come to nothing.

LISETTE : What ! You will not marry the man he chooses for you ?

SILVIA : Who knows ? He may not suit me and the idea of it troubles me.

LISETTE : They say your future husband is one of the finest gentlemen living, that he is well built, charming, handsome ; that no one could be cleverer and no one could have a better disposition. What more can you want ? Can you imagine a happier marriage, a more delightful union ?

SILVIA : Delightful ? How exaggerated your phrases are !

LISETTE : Faith ! Madam, 'tis well when such a lover is content to be married according to form ; there is hardly a woman who would not be in danger of wedding him without a ceremony if he made love to her. Charming and well-made, there is a competence for love ; sociable and clever, there you have enough to provide for companionship. Pardi ! everything about him is good ; the useful and the pleasant, it is all there.

SILVIA : Yes, in the portrait you make of him. He is said to resemble it ; but that is only gossip and I may well be of another opinion. He is a handsome man, they say, and that is almost so much the worse.

LISETTE : So much the worse ! So much the worse ! There's a topsy-turvy idea !

SILVIA : An idea of very good sense. A handsome man is often a coxcomb, I have noticed.

LISETTE : Oh ! He is wrong to be a coxcomb but he is right to be handsome.

SILVIA : They say that he is well-made—but let that pass.

LISETTE : Ah yes, that is forgivable.

SILVIA : As for beauty and good looks, I can do without them in him ; they are superfluous amenities.

LISETTE : Vertuchoux ! If ever I marry, this superfluity will be my necessity.

SILVIA : You do not know what you are saying. In marriage, one has more often to deal with a reasonable man than with a charming man : in a word, I only ask a tolerable character, and that is more difficult to find than people think. His character is greatly praised, but who has lived with him ? Do not men counterfeit a character, especially when they have brains ? Have I not seen myself those who in the company of friends seemed the best creatures imaginable ? They are all kindness, reason, cheerfulness even ; everything down to their faces is a guarantee of the good qualities we see in them. “ Monsieur such-an-one has the air of a gentleman, of a very reasonable man ”, say they every day of Ergaste. “ And so he is ”, reply others : I have said it myself. His face does not deceive you at all. Yes, trust in that gentle obliging face, which disappears a quarter of an hour later and gives way to a sombre, brutal, ferocious visage which is the terror of the whole house. Ergaste is married ; his wife, his children, his servants, only know him with this face, while he walks abroad with that charming face we know him by, which is only a mask he puts on when he leaves home.

LISETTE : What a fantastic figure with his two faces !

SILVIA : Are we not pleased with Leandre when we see him ? Well ! At home he is a man who speaks not a word, who neither laughs nor scolds ; he is a frozen, solitary, inaccessible soul. His wife hardly knows him, he has nothing to do with her ; she is married to a figure who comes out of his study to meals and kills with

langour, coldness, and boredom everything around him. There is a very amusing husband ?

LISETTE : I freeze at your description of him. But what of Tersandre ?

SILVIA : Yes, Tersandre ! The other day he had just been quarrelling with his wife. I arrive, am announced ; I see a man who comes towards me with open arms, unconstrained, serene ; you would have said that he had just left the most playful conversation ; his eyes and mouth were still laughing. The deceiver ! That is what men are. Who can think that this wife is to be pitied with him ? I found her downcast, with a sallow complexion and eyes that had been weeping ; I found her as I shall be perhaps : there is my portrait in the future ; at least I run the risk of being its copy. I pitied her, Lisette ; suppose I should come to have you pity me ? It is terrible. What do you say ? Think what it is—a husband.

LISETTE : A husband ? . . . is a husband. You should not have ended with that word ; it reconciles me with all the rest.

(Enter M. Orgon)

M. ORGON : Good morning, child. Will the news I bring give you pleasure ? Your future husband arrives to-day ; so this letter from his father informs me. You do not reply and you look downcast ? Lisette for her part drops her eyes ? What does this mean ? Speak up, Lisette, what is the matter ?

LISETTE : Sir, a face which makes one shudder, another which makes one die of cold, a frozen soul who stands apart ; and then the portrait of a woman, who has just been weeping, who has a dejected countenance, a sallow complexion and puffed eyes ; that, sir, is what we were considering with so much concentration.

M. ORGON : What is the meaning of this rigmarole ?

A soul? A portrait? Explain yourself; I don't understand what you are talking about.

SILVIA: I was talking to Lisette about the misery of a wife who is ill-treated by her husband; I mentioned Tersandre's whom I found very downcast the other day because her husband had just been quarrelling with her; and I was making a few reflections on the subject.

LISETTE: Yes, we were speaking of a face which continually changes; we were saying that a husband wears a mask before the world and a grimace before his wife.

M. ORGON: From all this, child, I apprehend that marriage alarms you, the more since you do not know Dorante.

LISETTE: First of all, he is handsome, and that is almost so much the worse.

M. ORGON: So much the worse! Are you dreaming with your so much the worse?

LISETTE: I only repeat what I am taught; the doctrine is Madam's; I study at her feet.

M. ORGON: Come, come, there is no need for all this. My dear child, you know how much I love you. Dorante comes with the intention of marrying you. On my last journey into the country I arranged the match with his father who is my old, my intimate friend; but it was on condition that you pleased each other and that you had full liberty to speak out in the matter. I forbid you any compliance out of regard for me. If Dorante does not suit you, you have only to say so and he leaves; if you do not suit him, he also leaves.

LISETTE: A tender duet will decide, as at the opera: "You want me, I want you; quick, a notary!" or else: "Do you love me? No; nor I; quick, to horse!"

M. ORGON: I have never seen Dorante: he was away when I was at his father's house; but from all the good I have been told of him I cannot fear that either of you will refuse the other.

SILVIA : I am very touched by your kindness, father. You forbid me all mere compliance, and I shall obey you.

M. ORGON : I order you.

SILVIA : But if I dared I should propose, from an idea that has come to me, that you grant me something which will put me at rest altogether.

M. ORGON : Speak . . . if the thing can be done, I grant it.

SILVIA : It can easily be done, but I am afraid of abusing your kindness.

M. ORGON : Well, abuse it. Come, in this world, we must be a little too good to be good enough.

LISETTE : Only the best of men would say that.

M. ORGON : Explain yourself, daughter.

SILVIA : Dorante arrives here to-day. . . If I could see him, watch him a little without his knowing me ! Lisette has her wits about her, sir ; she could take my place for a little time and I would take hers.

M. ORGON (*aside*) : Her idea is amusing. (*Aloud*) : Let me think over a little what you have just said. (*Aside*) : If I let her do it something quite strange will happen. She does not expect it. . . (*Aloud*) : So be it, child, I permit you this disguise. Are you sure you can sustain your part, Lisette ?

LISETTE : I, sir ? You know who I am ; try to make love to me and be lacking in respect to this countenance, if you dare. There is a specimen of the manners I meet you with. What do you say ? Eh ? Do you find Lisette again ?

M. ORGON : Well ! I am actually deceived myself. But there is no time to lose : go and dress according to your rôle. Dorante might surprise us. Hasten, and let everyone in the house know what is going on.

SILVIA : I need practically nothing but an apron.

LISETTE : And I go to my toilette. Come and dress my

hair, Lisette, to accustom yourself to your functions . . . a little attention to your duty, if you please !

SILVIA : You shall be served, Madam. Forward !

(Enter Mario)

MARIO : Sister, I congratulate you on the news I hear . . . we are to see your lover, they say.

SILVIA : Yes, brother, but I have no time to stay ; I have important business, my father will tell you about it. I must go.

(Silvia and Lisette go out)

M. ORGON : Do not delay her Mario ; come, you shall know what is happening.

MARIO : What fresh news, sir ?

M. ORGON : I must begin by warning you to be discreet, at least about what I am going to tell you.

MARIO : I shall obey your orders.

M. ORGON : We shall see Dorante to-day ; but we shall only see him in disguise.

MARIO : Disguised ! Is he coming as part of a masque ? Is he giving a ball for you ?

M. ORGON : Listen to this paragraph of his father's letter. Um ! " But I do not know what you will think of a fancy that has struck my son ; he himself admits that it is whimsical ; but the motive is a pardonable and even a delicate one : he has asked me to allow him to come to you at first as the valet, who, in turn, will take on the figure of his master."

MARIO : Ha ! Ha ! It will be amusing.

M. ORGON : Listen to the rest : " My son knows how serious is the obligation he is about to undertake, and hopes (he says) during this brief disguise, to find out some of the chief points of my future daughter's character and to

know her better, so that he may afterwards determine what to do in accordance with the liberty we have agreed to leave them. I have consented, for I have every faith in what you have told me of your amiable daughter, but I have taken the precaution to inform you of it although he asked me to keep it secret from you. You will act as you judge fit towards the bride. . . ."

That is what his father writes me. But that is not all; this is what has happened now. Your sister, uneasy about Dorante on her part, and not knowing the secret, has asked my permission to play the same comedy here and that precisely to observe Dorante, as Dorante wishes to observe her. What do you say? Did you ever know anything more singular? At this moment the mistress and maid are changing parts. What do you advise, Mario? Shall I tell your sister, or not?

MARIO: Faith, sir, since matters have taken this course, I should not disturb them and I should respect the idea which has inspired both of them. They will be forced to speak to each other frequently in this disguise. Let us see whether their hearts will not tell them what the other is worth. Perhaps Dorante will take a fancy to my sister even disguised as a maid-servant, and that would be charming for her.

M. ORGON: We shall see how she will come out of the entanglement.

MARIO: It is an enterprise which cannot fail to entertain us. I must be present at its beginning and urge them both on.

(Enter Silvia)

SILVIA: Here I am, sir, do I look an ungraceful, waiting-maid? Brother, you seem to know what is arranged. . . . What do you think of me?

MARIO: Faith, sister, the valet is as good as captured; but you may also capture Dorante from his mistress.

SILVIA: Frankly, I should not regret pleasing him in the part I am playing; I should not be sorry to overcome his reason, to worry him a little with the disparity of rank between us. If my attractions achieve that, they will do me a pleasure; I shall value them. Moreover, this will help me to observe Dorante. As to his valet, I am not afraid of his attentions; he will not dare to come near me; there will be something in my demeanour to inspire more respect than love in the rascal.

MARIO: Softly, sister, this rascal will be your equal. . .

M. ORGON: And will not fail to fall in love with you.

SILVIA: Well, the honour of pleasing him will not be useless to me. Valets are naturally indiscreet; love is naturally a gossip and I shall make him tell tales of his master.

(Enter a Valet)

VALET: A servant has just come and asks to speak to you, sir; he has with him a street porter carrying a bag.

M. ORGON: Let him come in. It is certainly Dorante's valet. His master may have been delayed by his affairs. Where is Lisette?

SILVIA: Lisette is dressing, and from her mirror decides that we are very imprudent to yield her Dorante; she will soon be ready.

M. ORGON: Softly! Someone is coming.

(Enter Dorante disguised as a valet)

DORANTE: I am looking for M. Orgon: it is to him I have the honour to bow?

M. ORGON: Yes, my good fellow, to himself.

DORANTE: Sir, you have no doubt received news of us; I am in M. Dorante's service; he is following me and

sends me ahead to assure you of his respect until he can do so himself.

M. ORGON : You acquit yourself of your errand well. Lisette, what do you say to this young man ?

SILVIA : I say, sir, that he is welcome and that he promises well.

DORANTE : You are very kind ; I do the best I can.

MARIO : He is certainly handsome ; the best your heart can do is to defend itself, Lisette.

SILVIA : My heart ! What is that to do with him ?

DORANTE : Do not be angry, Mademoiselle ; what the gentleman says does not delude me.

SILVIA : Your modesty pleases me ; continue with it.

MARIO : Very good ! But it occurs to me that this title of " Mademoiselle " he gives you is very weighty. Among people like you the style of compliments should not be so grave ; you would be always on the alert : come, behave more comfortably. Your name is Lisette ; and you, young man, what is your name ?

DORANTE : Bourguignon, sir, at your service.

SILVIA : Well, Bourguignon, then.

DORANTE : Let it be Lisette ; I shall be none the less your servant.

MARIO : Your servant ! That is not your kind of talk ; you should say " thy servant ".¹

M. ORGON : Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

SILVIA (*aside to Mario*) : You are teasing me, brother.

DORANTE : In the matter of " Tutoiement " I await Lisette's orders.

SILVIA : Do as you² wish, Bourguignon ; the ice is broken now, since it amuses these gentlemen.

¹ Referring to the custom of " Tutoiement " of lovers, of master to servant and between servants. It is impossible to render this scene exactly.

² She uses " thou."

DORANTE: Thank you, Lisette; I respond at once to the honour you¹ do me.

M. ORGON: Excellent, my children! If you begin to love² each other you will be freed from ceremonies.

MARIO: Oh! softly! To love each other is another matter; perhaps you do not know that I have designs on Lisette's heart. True, it is insensible to me, but I do not want Bourguignon as a rival.

SILVIA: Ah, you take that tone? Well, I want Bourguignon to love me.

DORANTE: You wrong yourself by saying "I want", pretty Lisette; you have no need to give orders to be served.

MARIO: Monsieur Bourguignon, you stole that gallant compliment somewhere.

DORANTE: You are right, sir, I took it from her eyes.

MARIO: Hush! That is still worse; I forbid you to have so much wit.

SILVIA: It is not at your expense, and if he finds it in my eyes he has only to take it.

M. ORGON: My boy, you will get the worst of the argument; let us go. Dorante will be coming; let us inform my daughter; and you, Lisette, show this young man his master's rooms. Good day, Bourguignon.

DORANTE: Sir, you do me too much honour.

(M. Orgon and Mario go out)

SILVIA (*aside*): They are laughing at me; no matter, I shall make use of everything. This young man is no fool and I don't pity the waiting-maid who has him. He is going to make love to me: let him talk, so long as he brings me information.

DORANTE (*aside*): This girl is amazing! There is not

¹ "thou" again.

² The double meaning of "aimer," "like" and "love," is punned on through the scene.

a woman in the world who would not be honoured by such a bearing : let us make her acquaintance. (*Aloud*) : Since we are on such friendly terms and have put ceremony aside, tell me, Lisette, is your mistress worthy of you ? She is very bold to dare to have a waiting-maid like you.

SILVIA : Bourguignon, that question tells me that, in accordance with custom, you come here with the intention of flattering me ; is that not so ?

DORANTE : Faith ! I did not come with the intention, I must admit. Although I am only a valet, I have had little to do with waiting-maids ; I don't like the tone of servants ; but with you it is very different. Why ! you daunt me ; I am almost timid ; my intimacy would not dare to grow familiar with you ; ¹ I have a perpetual desire to take off my hat and when I " tutoie " you it seems as if I were acting ; finally I have an inclination to treat you with a respect which would make you laugh. What kind of a servant are you with your regal air ?

SILVIA : Why, all that you say you felt at seeing me is precisely the case with all the valets who have seen me.

DORANTE : Faith, I should not be surprised if it were the case with all the masters, too.

SILVIA : The shaft is a pretty one, certainly ; but I repeat I am not accustomed to cajoleries from those whose dress resembles yours.

DORANTE : That means my clothes do not please you ?

SILVIA : No, Bourguignon ; let us put love aside and be good friends.

DORANTE : Nothing more ? Your little treaty is only composed of two impossible clauses.

SILVIA (*aside*) : What a man to be a valet ! (*Aloud*) : It must be carried out though ; it has been foretold that I

¹ " Ma familiarité n'oserait s'apprivoiser avec toi " . . . a typical piece of " Marivandage " ; the reader will see what constant pitfalls it holds for the translator,

should never marry anyone but a man of quality and I vowed thereafter never to listen to others.

DORANTE: Parbleu! That is amusing! What you have vowed for men I have vowed for women: I have taken an oath never to love seriously any but a lady of quality.

SILVIA: Then do not depart from your intention.

DORANTE: Perhaps I am not departing from it as much as we think; and people are sometimes ladies of quality without knowing it.

SILVIA: Ha! Ha! Ha! I should thank you for your praise if it were not at my mother's expense.

DORANTE: Well, avenge it on mine if you think I look well enough to deserve it.

SILVIA (*aside*): He would deserve it. . . (*Aloud*): But there is no question of that; enough of trifling. A man of quality has been foretold as my husband and I will take nothing less.

DORANTE: Parbleu! If I were one the prophecy would threaten me; I should be afraid I might verify it. I have no faith in astrology but I have a great deal in your face.

SILVIA (*aside*): He is inexhaustible. (*Aloud*): Will you desist! What matters the prophecy since you are excluded by it!

DORANTE: It did not predict that I should not love you.

SILVIA: No, but it said you will gain nothing by so doing and I confirm what it says.

DORANTE: You do well, Lisette: this pride suits you wonderfully and although it is in opposition to me I am still very glad to see it in you; I hoped you might have it as soon as I saw you; that grace you still needed and I am consoled for losing by it since you gain by it.

SILVIA (*aside*): But really this is a surprising young man, although I am. . . (*Aloud*): Tell me, who are you who speak to me thus?

DORANTE : The son of gentle people who were not rich.

SILVIA : Come, I wish you a better situation with all my heart and I wish I could help you to one ; fate has treated you badly.

DORANTE : Faith ! Love has treated me worse ; I would rather it were granted me to ask your heart than to have all the possessions in the world.

SILVIA (*aside*) : Here we are, thanks to Heaven, in a set conversation. (*Aloud*) : Bourguignon, I cannot be angry with you for what you have said to me, but I beg you, let us change the subject. Let us come to your master. You can deprive yourself of talking of love to me, I suppose ?

DORANTE : You might deprive yourself of making me feel it.

SILVIA : Ah ! I shall be angry ; you make me out of patience. Once more, put aside your love.

DORANTE : Put aside your face then.

SILVIA (*aside*) : I begin to think he is delaying me intentionally. (*Aloud*) : Well, Bourguignon, you will not make an end ? Must I leave you ? (*Aside*) : I ought to have done so already.

DORANTE : Listen, Lisette ; I really want to speak to you of something else ; but I no longer know what it is.

SILVIA : For my part I had something to say to you, but you have made me lose the thread of my ideas.

DORANTE : I remember I asked you if your mistress were worthy of you.

SILVIA : You come back to your road by a detour ; farewell.

DORANTE : Ah, no, say I, Lisette ; my master only is concerned here.

SILVIA : Well ! So be it. I wanted to speak to you about him also and I hope you will tell me in confidence what he is. Your attachment to him gives me a good opinion of him ; he must be a man of merit, since you serve him.

DORANTE : You will perhaps allow me to thank you for what you have just said ?

SILVIA : Will you be good enough to pay no attention to my imprudence in saying it ?

DORANTE : Another of these answers that outwit me ! Do as you will, I shall not resist, and I am unfortunate to find myself restrained by all that is most amiable.

SILVIA : And I should like to know how it happens that I have the kindness to listen to you, for assuredly, that is curious.

DORANTE : You are right, our experience is unique.

SILVIA (*aside*) : In spite of all he has said, I have not gone, I do not go, I am still here and I reply to him ! Really, this passes a jest. (*Aloud*) : Farewell.

DORANTE : Let us finish what we have to say.

SILVIA : Farewell, I say ; no more indulgence. When your master comes, I shall try on my mistress's behalf to get to know him myself, if he is worth the trouble. Meanwhile, you see that room ; it is yours.

DORANTE : Ah ! Here is my master.

(*Enter Arlequin*) ¹

ARLEQUIN : Ah ! There you are Bourguignon ? Were you and my portmanteau well received ?

DORANTE : It was not possible that they should receive us badly, sir.

ARLEQUIN : A servant below told me to come in here and said he would inform my father-in-law, who is with my wife.

SILVIA : You mean M. Orgon, and his daughter, no doubt, sir ?

ARLEQUIN : Ah yes, my father-in-law and my wife—

¹ In Harlequin costume ; this part was taken by the celebrated Arlequin, Thomassin.

the same thing. I come to be married and they are waiting for me to marry ; that is understood ; there needs only the ceremony and that's a trifle.

SILVIA : It is a trifle which is worth the trouble of thinking about.

ARLEQUIN : Yes, but when one has thought about it one thinks about it no more.

SILVIA (*aside to Dorante*) : Bourguignon, it seems to me a man is a gentleman very cheaply in your part of the country.

ARLEQUIN : What are you saying to my valet, pretty one ?

SILVIA : Nothing : I only said I would ask M. Orgon to come down.

ARLEQUIN : And why not say my father-in-law like me ?

SILVIA : Because he is not that yet.

DORANTE : She is right, sir, the marriage is not yet made.

ARLEQUIN : Well, here I am to make it !

DORANTE : Wait until it is made then.

ARLEQUIN : Pardi ! Here's a fuss over a father-in-law of last night or to-morrow morning !

SILVIA : Indeed what great difference is there between being married and not being married ? Yes, sir, we are wrong, and I will run and tell your father-in-law that you have arrived.

ARLEQUIN : And my wife too, I beg of you. But before you go, tell me one thing ; you who are so pretty, are you not the lady's-maid of the house ?

SILVIA : You have said it.

ARLEQUIN : Good ; I am glad of it. Do you think I shall create a good impression here ? What do you think of me ?

SILVIA : I think you are . . . amusing.

ARLEQUIN : Good, so much the better ; continue in that sentiment, it may find its opportunity.

SILVIA : You are very modest to be contented with it. But I must leave you : they must have forgotten to tell your father-in-law for assuredly he would have come, and I must go.

ARLEQUIN : Tell him that I await him with affection.

SILVIA (*aside*) : How singular fate is ! Neither of these two men is in his place.

(*Silvia goes out*)

ARLEQUIN : Well, sir, my opening went off well ; I have charmed the lady's-maid already.

DORANTE : You're a blockhead.

ARLEQUIN : But why ? My entrance was so elegant.

DORANTE : You promised me so often you would give up your trivial, silly ways of speech ! I gave you such good lessons ! I warned you to be nothing but serious. I see I was a madcap to have trusted you.

ARLEQUIN : I shall do better in the sequel, and since it is not enough to be serious I will lean towards the melancholy, I will weep, if need be.

DORANTE : I don't know what I am at ; this adventure stuns me. What ought I to do ?

ARLEQUIN : Isn't the daughter amusing ?

DORANTE : Hush ! Here comes M. Orgon.

(*Enter M. Orgon*)

M. ORGON : My dear sir, I beg a thousand pardons for having made you wait ; but I have only this instant learned that you are here.

ARLEQUIN : Sir, a thousand pardons are too many ; only one is needed when only one error has been made. Moreover, all my pardons are at your service.

M. ORGON : I shall try not to need them.

ARLEQUIN : You are the master and I the servant.

M. ORGON : I am charmed to see you, I assure you, and I was waiting for you impatiently.

ARLEQUIN : I should have come here at once with Bourguignon ; but at the end of a journey, one is in such a state ! And I was glad to present myself in a more savoury condition.

M. ORGON : You have succeeded admirably. My daughter is dressing, she has been a little unwell. Before she comes down would you like some refreshment ?

ARLEQUIN : Oh, I've never refused to clink glasses with anyone.

M. ORGON : Bourguignon, look after yourself.

ARLEQUIN : That dog is a wine-bibber : he'll drink of the best.

M. ORGON : Let him not spare it.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

(Lisette and M. Orgon)

M. ORGON : Well, what is it you want, Lisette ?

LISETTE : To speak to you for a moment.

M. ORGON : What is it about ?

LISETTE : I have to tell you about the state of affairs because it is important they should be clear to you, so that you can have no cause to complain of me.

M. ORGON : It is very serious then ?

LISETTE : Yes, very serious. You consented to Mademoiselle Silvia's disguise ; at first I myself thought it unimportant, but I was wrong.

M. ORGON : And of what importance is it then ?

LISETTE : It is hard to praise oneself, sir ; but in spite of all the dictates of modesty I must tell you that if you do not interfere with what is happening, your supposed son-in-law will no longer have a heart to give my mistress, your daughter. It is time for her to reveal herself, it is urgent ; for, one day longer and I cannot answer for the consequences.

M. ORGON : Eh ! How comes it that he no longer wants my daughter ? When he finds her out do you mistrust her charms ?

LISETTE : No, but you do not mistrust mine enough. I warn you that they are in operation and I do not advise you to let them continue.

M. ORGON : I give you my compliments, Lisette.
(He laughs) : Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

LISETTE : There you are ! You make a jest of it, sir, you sneer at me. I am sorry, you will suffer for it.

M. ORGON : Do not be disturbed by it, Lisette ; go your own way.

LISETTE : I repeat once more, Dorante's heart moves rapidly. At the moment I please him greatly, to-night he will love me, to-morrow he will adore me. I do not deserve it ; he has bad taste ; put it how you please but that will not alter it. To-morrow I guarantee that I shall be adored.

M. ORGON : Well, and what of it ? If he loves you so much let him marry you.

LISETTE : What ! You would not prevent him ?

M. ORGON : No, on my word as a man of honour, if you can bring him to the point.

LISETTE : Be careful, sir. Up to now I have not seconded my attractions, I have let them act alone, I have spared his head, but if I intervene he is overthrown, there is no help for it.

M. ORGON : Overthrow, ravage, burn, marry even, if you can ; I permit it.

LISETTE : On that footing I count my fortune made.

M. ORGON : But tell me, has my daughter spoken to you ? What does she think of her proposed husband ?

LISETTE : We have not yet found a moment to speak to each other, for this proposed husband besets me ; but from a distance I do not believe she is pleased ; I think she is unhappy and preoccupied and I am prepared for her to ask me to rebuff him.

M. ORGON : And I forbid it. I shall avoid an explanation with her ; I have reasons for prolonging this disguise : I want her to observe her future husband at greater leisure. But the valet—how does he conduct himself ? Has he not taken on himself to fall in love with my daughter ?

LISETTE : He is a character : I have noticed that he

plays the man of consequence before her, because he is handsome ; he looks at her and sighs.

M. ORGON : And that annoys her.

LISETTE : But . . . she blushes.

M. ORGON : You are wrong ; a valet's gaze would not embarrass her to that extent.

LISETTE : Sir, she blushes.

M. ORGON : It was with indignation then.

LISETTE : As you please.

M. ORGON : Well, when you speak to her, tell her that you suspect the valet of prejudicing her against his master ; and if she is angry, never mind ; that is my affair. But here is Dorante who is looking for you apparently.

(Enter Arlequin)

ARLEQUIN : Ah ! Here you are, marvellous lady ! I was asking everyone for you. Servant, dear father-in-law or very nearly so.

M. ORGON : Servant. Good-bye, my children : I leave you together ; it is good that you should love each other a little before marrying.

ARLEQUIN : I would undertake those two jobs at the same time.

M. ORGON : No impatience. Good-bye.

(M. Orgon goes out)

ARLEQUIN : Madam, he tells me not to be impatient ; it is easy for the old fellow to talk of it.

LISETTE : I cannot think it can mean so much to you to wait ; it is mere flattery for you to pretend such impatience ; you have barely arrived here. Your love cannot be very strong ; at best 'tis only an infant love.

ARLEQUIN : You are wrong, O wonder of our days : a love like ours does not stay long in the cradle ; your

first glance gave birth to mine, the second gave him strength, the third made him adult. Let us try to set him up as soon as we can ; take care of him since you are his mother.

LISETTE : Do you think he is badly treated ? Is he abandoned ?

ARLEQUIN : Until he is provided for, give him just your lovely white hand to amuse him a little.

LISETTE : Here, then, impertunity ! Since there is no peace unless you are amused.

ARLEQUIN (*kissing her hand*) : Dear plaything of my soul ! This rejoices me like delicious wine. What a pity to have only a taste of it !

LISETTE : Stop, stop ! You are too greedy.

ARLEQUIN : I only ask to sustain myself, until I live.

LISETTE : But you must keep within reason.

ARLEQUIN : Reason ? Alas ! I have lost it ; your lovely eyes are the burglars who have robbed me of it.

LISETTE : But is it possible that you love me so much ? I cannot convince myself.

ARLEQUIN : I do not care about what is possible, but I love you like a madman, and you will see in your mirror that I am right.

LISETTE : My mirror will only make me more incredulous.

ARLEQUIN : Ah ! Darling ! Adorable one ! humility in you would only be hypocrisy !

LISETTE : Someone is coming ; it is your valet.

(*Enter Dorante*)

DORANTE : May I speak to you for a moment, sir ?

ARLEQUIN : No ! Damn the menials who can't leave us alone !

LISETTE : See what he wants with you, sir.

DORANTE : I have only a word to say to you.

ARLEQUIN : Madam, if he says two, the third will be his dismissal. Well ?

DORANTE (*aside to Arlequin*) : Come here, you impertinent scoundrel !

ARLEQUIN (*aside to Dorante*) : Those are insults, not words. (*aside to Lisette*) : My queen, excuse me.

LISETTE : Certainly, certainly.

DORANTE : Get rid of all this. Do not betray yourself ; seem serious and reflective and even discontented : do you hear ?

ARLEQUIN : Yes, my friend ; do not disturb yourself, but leave us.

(*Dorante goes out*)

ARLEQUIN : Ah, Madam ! But for him I was about to say such wonderful things to you and now I shall only find common ones, except my love which is extraordinary. But, now I speak of my love, when will yours keep it company ?

LISETTE : We must hope it will come.

ARLEQUIN : And do you think it will come ?

LISETTE : The question is a shrewd one : do you know you are embarrassing me ?

ARLEQUIN : What do you expect ? I am burning and so I shout " Fire ! "

LISETTE : If it were permissible for me to explain so soon. . .

ARLEQUIN : In my opinion you may do so conscientiously.

LISETTE : The restraint of my sex forbids it.

ARLEQUIN : That restraint doesn't belong to the present day, which permits more freedom.

LISETTE : But what do you ask of me ?

ARLEQUIN : Tell me a little bit that you love me. See, I love you. Be the echo, repeat it, Princess.

LISETTE : Insatiable ! Well, sir, I love you.

ARLEQUIN : Ah ! madam, I die, my happiness confounds me, I fear I shall rush out into the fields away from it. You love me ; admirable !

LISETTE : In my turn, I have reason to be astonished at the rapidity of your homage. Perhaps you will love me less when we know each other better.

ARLEQUIN : Ah, Madam, when we get there I shall lose a great deal, there will be much to reckon off.

LISETTE : You believe I have more qualities than I have.

ARLEQUIN : And you, Madam, do not know mine ; and I ought only to speak to you on my knees.

LISETTE : Remember we are not the governors of our fate.

ARLEQUIN : Fathers and mothers do everything their own way.

LISETTE : For myself, my heart would have chosen you, in whatever rank you had been.

ARLEQUIN : It has a good opportunity to choose me again.

LISETTE : May I flatter myself you feel the same towards me ?

ARLEQUIN : Alas ! had you been only Perrette or Margot, had I seen you going into the cellar with the candle-stick in your hand, you would have always have been my princess.

LISETTE : May such fine sentiments be lasting !

ARLEQUIN : To strengthen them on either side, let us swear to love each other for ever, in spite of all the spelling faults you may make on my account.¹

LISETTE : I have more interest in that oath than you ; and I make it with all my heart.

ARLEQUIN (*gets on his knees*) : Your goodness dazzles me, and I prostrate myself before it.

LISETTE : Stop ! I cannot suffer you to be in that

¹ Arlequin refers to flaws in a legal document.

position ; I should be ridiculous to leave you in it : get up. Someone else is coming.

(Enter Silvia)

LISETTE : What do you want, Silvia ?

SILVIA : I have something to say to you, Madam.

ARLEQUIN : There you are ! Hey, my dear, come back again in a quarter of an hour : the waiting-maids of my country only come in when they are called.

SILVIA : Sir, I must speak to Madam.

ARLEQUIN : What an obstinate maid ! Queen of my life, send her away. Go away, my girl : we have been ordered to love before we marry ; don't interrupt our functions.

LISETTE : Can you come back in a moment, Silvia ?

SILVIA : But, Madam. . .

ARLEQUIN : But, but, that but will give me a fever.

SILVIA *(aside)* : Ah ! Base man ! *(Aloud)* : Madam, I assure you it is urgent.

LISETTE : Allow me to get rid of her, sir.

ARLEQUIN : Since the devil wills it and she too. . . Patience . . . I will walk about until she has done. Ah ! what silly creatures our servants are !

(Arlequin goes out)

SILVIA : It seems to me remarkable that you could not send him away at once and that you made me endure that creature's brutality.

LISETTE : Pardi ! Madam, I cannot play two parts at once ; I must appear either mistress or maid, I must obey or command.

SILVIA : Very good, but he is not here now ; so listen to me as your mistress. You can see that such a man could not suit me.

LISETTE : You have not had time to observe him well.

SILVIA : Are you mad, you and your observation ? Is it necessary to see him twice to realise how little he is suitable ? In a word, I do not want him. Apparently my father does not approve the repugnance he sees in me, for he avoids me and says not a word. At this juncture you must bring me off from this affair by skilfully showing this young man that you have no desire to marry him.

LISETTE : I cannot, Madam.

SILVIA : You cannot ! And what prevents you ?

LISETTE : Monsieur Orgon has forbidden me to do so.

SILVIA : Forbidden you ! But such a proceeding is very unlike my father !

LISETTE : Positively forbidden.

SILVIA : Well, I bid you tell him my disgust and assure him it is invincible. I cannot believe that after that he will want to push the matter further.

LISETTE : But, Madam, what is there so disagreeable and repulsive about him ?

SILVIA : He displeases me, I tell you, and so does your lack of zeal.

LISETTE : Take time to see what he is ; this is all that is asked of you.

SILVIA : I hate him enough without taking time to hate him more.

LISETTE : His valet, who plays the important, has set your mind against him.

SILVIA : Why, little fool, what has the valet to do with it ?

LISETTE : I do not trust him, he reasons too much.

SILVIA : Be done with your character-studies, they are not needed here. I take care the valet says little to me and the little he has said to me has been very sensible.

LISETTE : He seems to me the sort of man to tell you blundering stories to show off his wit.

SILVIA : You know my disguise forces me to listen to

pretty things ! Whom are you angry with ? Whence comes this mania of imputing to the poor lad a repugnance in which he has no share ? Why, you oblige me to justify him ; there is no reason to embroil him with his master or to make him out a rascal in order to make me a fool, because I listen to his stories.

LISETTE : Oh, Madam, as soon as you defend yourself in *that* tone and it goes so far as to offend you, I have nothing more to say.

SILVIA : As soon as I defend myself in *that* tone ! And what a tone you say that in yourself ! What do you mean ? What is in your mind ?

LISETTE : I say, Madam, that I have never before seen you as you are now and that I cannot understand your sharpness. Well ! If the valet has said nothing, so be it ; there is no need to fly into a passion to justify him ; I believe you and there is an end of it ; I do not oppose myself to the good opinion you have of him.

SILVIA : See her bitter wit ! How she twists things about ! I am so indignant . . . I feel . . . like crying.

LISETTE : But why, Madam ? What malice can you find in what I say ?

SILVIA : I find malice ! I quarrel with you on his behalf ! I have a good opinion of him ! You carry your impertinence to that extent ! Good opinion, just Heaven, good opinion ! What does that mean ? To whom are you speaking ? Who is secure from what is happening to me ? Where are we ?

LISETTE : I don't know, but it will take me a long time to recover from the surprise you have thrown me into.

SILVIA : She has a way of putting things which makes me lose all patience. Go away, you are insupportable ; leave me, I shall take other measures.

(*Lisette goes out*)

SILVIA : I am still trembling at what I heard her say.

With what impudence servants treat us in their own minds ! How they degrade us ! I cannot recover from it ; I dare not think of the terms she used ; they still frighten me. And it concerns a valet ! Ah ! what a curious thing ! But let me put aside the idea with which that insolent baggage has soiled my imagination. Here is Bourguignon, here is the object in question on whose behalf I “ flew into a passion ” ; but it is not his fault, poor lad ! I should not make him suffer for it.

(Enter Dorante)

DORANTE : Lisette, however much you avoid me, I am compelled to speak to you ; I think I have reason to complain of you.

SILVIA : Bourguignon, let us not “ tutoie ” any more, I beg of you.¹

DORANTE : As you please.²

SILVIA : But you do not stop.³

DORANTE : Nor you either ; you said it yourself.

SILVIA : It escaped me.

DORANTE : Well, believe me, let us speak as we can ; it is not worth while troubling ourselves for the little time we have to see each other.

SILVIA : Is your master going ? There will be no great loss in him.

DORANTE : Nor in me either, isn't it so ? I complete your thought for you.

SILVIA : I could finish it myself if I wished ; but I was not thinking of you.

DORANTE : But I do not lose sight of you.

SILVIA : Come, Bourguignon, once for all ; stay, go, return, must all be a matter of indifference to me, and indeed is so : I wish you neither good nor evil ; I do not hate you and I do not love you ; nor shall I love you unless

¹ Yet she says “ Je t'en prie.” ² “ Comme tu voudras.”
³ still “ tu.” ⁴ “ Tu me dis : je t'en prie.”

my wits turn. That is how I feel ; my reason does not allow me to do otherwise and I ought not to have to tell you so.

DORANTE : My misfortune is inconceivable ; you are taking from me perhaps the repose of my whole life.

SILVIA : What fancy has he got into his mind ! He distresses me. Collect yourself. You speak to me and I answer : that is much, too much indeed, you may believe me, and if you knew everything, indeed you would be pleased with me ; you would find my kindness without parallel, a kindness I should censure in another. Yet I do not reproach myself, I am reassured from the depth of my heart ; what I do is praiseworthy and it is from generosity I speak to you ; but this cannot last ; such generosityes are good but for a time and I am not constituted to reassure myself continually of the purity of my motives. In the end, it would be nothing at all. Come, let us make an end ; Bourguignon, let us make an end, I beg you. What does it mean ? It is ridiculous. Come, let us not speak of it again.

DORANTE : Ah , my dear Lisette, how I suffer !

SILVIA : What is it you were going to say to me ? You were complaining of me when you came in ; what was it about ?

DORANTE : Nothing, a mere trifle ; I wanted to see you and I think I simply made this a pretext.

SILVIA (*aside*) : What can I say to that ? If I became angry, it would make no difference.

DORANTE : When your mistress went out she seemed to accuse me of having spoken to you to the disadvantage of my master.

SILVIA : She imagines so and if she speaks of it to you again, you can deny it boldly ; I will answer for the rest.

DORANTE : Eh ! That does not occupy me.

SILVIA : If that is all you have to say to me, we have nothing more to do together.

DORANTE : Leave me at least the pleasure of seeing you.

SILVIA : You give me an excellent motive ! I am to amuse Bourguignon's passion ! The memory of all this will make me laugh heartily one day.

DORANTE : You jest at me ; you are right ; I don't know what I am saying nor what I ask of you. Good-bye.

SILVIA : Good-bye ; you are taking the right course. . . . But while you are saying good-bye, there is still one thing I want to know. You are leaving, you say. . . Is that serious ?

DORANTE : For my part, I must either go or my head will turn.

SILVIA : I shall not prevent your going for that reply.

DORANTE : I have made only one mistake ; that was in not leaving you as soon as I saw you.

SILVIA (*aside*) : At every moment, I need to forget that I am listening to him.

DORANTE : If you knew the state I am in, Lisette !

SILVIA : Oh, it is not so strange as mine, I assure you.

DORANTE : What can you reproach me with ? I do not propose to awaken your tenderness.

SILVIA (*aside*) : It would not do to rely on that.

DORANTE : And what could I hope for if I tried to make myself beloved ? Alas ! Even if I had your heart. . . .

SILVIA : From which Heaven preserve me ! When you have it, you shall not know it and I shall take such care that I shall not even know it myself. Why, what an idea !

DORANTE : Then it is true you neither hate me, nor love me, nor ever will love me ?

SILVIA : Certainly.

DORANTE : Certainly ! What is there so horrible about me ?

SILVIA : Nothing ; that is not what is against you.

DORANTE : Well, dear Lisette, tell me a hundred times you will never love me.

SILVIA: Oh! I have said it often enough; try to believe me.

DORANTE: I must believe you. Make desperate a dangerous passion, save me from the effects I fear; you do not hate me, nor love me, nor ever will love me! I act in good faith, help me against myself; I need it; I ask for it on my knees.

(He throws himself on his knees. At this moment, M. Orgon and Mario enter, but say nothing)

SILVIA: Ah! It has come to this! My adventure only lacked this difficulty! How unfortunate I am! It is my complaisance puts him there. Rise, Bourguignon, I beg you; someone may come. I will say anything to please you. What do you want of me? I do not hate you. Rise; I would love you if I could; you do not displease me—that ought to content you.

DORANTE: What! Lisette, if I were not what I am, if I were rich, a man of quality, and loved you then as much as I now love you, your heart would feel no repugnance for me?

SILVIA: Assuredly.

DORANTE: You would not hate me? You would endure me?

SILVIA: Willingly . . . but, rise.

DORANTE: You appear to say it seriously and, if that is so, my reason is lost.

SILVIA: I say what you wish and yet you do not rise!

M. ORGON (*approaching*): It is a pity to interrupt you; everything goes excellently, my children. Courage!

SILVIA: I cannot prevent this young man from getting on his knees, sir; I am not in a position to compel him, I imagine?

M. ORGON: You are both perfectly suited to each other; but I have a word to say to you, Lisette, and you

shall continue your conversation when we have gone. You agree, Bourguignon ?

DORANTE : I will retire, sir.

M. ORGON : Go then and try to speak of your master with a little more deference than you do.

DORANTE : I, sir ?

MARIO : You, Master Bougruignon ; you do not shine, it is said, by the respect you have for your master.

DORANTE : I don't know what you mean.

M. ORGON : Off with you, off with you ; you shall justify yourself another time.

(Dorante goes out)

M. ORGON : Well, Silvia, you don't look at us ; you appear very embarrassed.

SILVIA : I, father ! And why should I be embarrassed ? I am, thank Heaven, in my usual state ; I am forced to tell you this is an idea on your part.

MARIO : There is something, sister, there is something.

SILVIA : Something in your head, if you like, brother ; but as to in mine, there is only astonishment at what you say.

M. ORGON : Is it the young man who has just gone out who inspires you with this extreme antipathy for his master ?

SILVIA : Who ? Dorante's servant ?

M. ORGON : Yes, the gallant Bourguignon.

SILVIA : The " gallant " Bourguignon, whose epithet I did not know, has not spoken to me of him.

M. ORGON : Yet it is asserted that he does him harm with you, and I was very glad to be able to speak to you about it.

SILVIA : It is not worth the trouble, father, and nobody in the world but his master himself has given me the natural aversion I have for him.

MARIO : Faith, for all you say, sister, it is too powerful to be so natural and someone must have helped it.

SILVIA (*sharply*) : How mysteriously you say that, brother ! And who is this " someone " who has helped it ? Well ?

MARIO : What a mood you are in, sister ! How you run into a passion !

SILVIA : It is because I am weary of my part, and I should have unmasked myself before now had I not feared to anger my father.

M. ORGON : Do nothing of the sort, my child ; I came here to warn you. Since I have been good enough to allow you to assume this disguise, you must be good enough, if you please, to suspend your judgment of Dorante and to see if the aversion you have been given for him is legitimate.

SILVIA : You will not listen to me then, father ? . . . I tell you it has not been given me.

MARIO : What ? Has that babbler who has just gone out not disgusted you with him a little ?

SILVIA (*heatedly*) : How disagreeable your remarks are ! " Disgusted " me with him ! " Disgusted " ! I have to endure most curious expressions ; I hear nothing but outrageous things, inconceivable language ; I " appear embarrassed," there " is something," and then the " gallant Bourguignon " has " disgusted " me with Dorante ! It is anything you please, but I fail to understand.

MARIO : This time you are the strange one. With whom are you angry now ? How is it you are so on the alert ? What do you suspect us of thinking ?

SILVIA : Well, brother ! . . . By what fatality is it that you cannot say a word to me to-day without offending me ? What do you suppose I should suspect you of ? Are you seeing visions ?

M. ORGON : It is true, you are so agitated I hardly

recognise you either. Apparently it was this agitation made Lisette speak to us as she did. She accused this valet of having spoken to you to the disadvantage of his master ; " and Madam ", she told us, " defended him against me with so much anger that I am still surprised " ; and it was about this word " surprised " that we disputed with her. But servants do not realise the consequence of a word.

SILVIA : The impertinent creature ! Could anything be more hateful than that baggage ? I admit I was angry, but it was from a feeling of justice towards the young man.

MARIO : I see nothing wrong in that.

SILVIA : Could anything be more simple ? What ! Because I am just, because I wish nobody harmed, because I wish to save a servant from the harm which might be caused him in his master's mind, it is said I run into " passions " and furies which " surprise " people ! A moment afterwards a malicious person reasons ; I must be angry, I must silence her and take part against her, because of the consequence of what she says ! My part ! So I must be defended, justified ! So what I do can be interpreted in a bad sense ? But what have I done ? What am I accused of ? Let me know, I beg you ; is it serious ? Are you laughing at me ? Are you jesting at me ? I am not easy about it.

M. ORGON : Gently, gently.

SILVIA : No, sir, no gentleness could endure it. What ! Surprises, consequences ! Let us have an explanation : What do you mean ? The valet is accused and I am in the wrong ; but you are all deceived, Lisette is mad, he is innocent, and that's an end of it. Why speak of it again to me ? It exasperates me !

M. ORGON : You are restraining yourself, daughter ; you would like to quarrel with me too. But we can do better ; only the valet is suspected here. Dorante has only to dismiss him.

SILVIA : Ah, this unfortunate disguise ! Above all

don't let Lisette come near me ! I hate her more than Dorante.

M. ORGON : You shall see her when you wish ; but you ought to be delighted that this young man is going away, since he loves you and this plainly is a burden to you.

SILVIA : I have no reason to complain of him ; he takes me for a lady's-maid and he speaks to me in that character ; but he does not say what he wants, I take care of that.

MARIO : You are not mistress of him as much as you say.

M. ORGON : Did we not see him get on his knees in spite of you ? And to make him get up were you not forced to tell him that he did not displease you ?

SILVIA (*aside*) : I am suffocated.

MARIO : And when he asked you if you would love him, you had to add tenderly : " Willingly " ; without which he would still be there.

SILVIA : A happy foot-note, brother ! But as the action displeased me, it is not kind of you to repeat it. Come, let us talk seriously ; when is this comedy at my expense to finish ?

M. ORGON : The only thing I exact from you, daughter, is not to make up your mind to refuse him without thorough knowledge. Wait a little. You will thank me for the delay I ask of you, I promise you.

MARIO : You will marry Dorante, and at your own desire too, I prophesy it. . . But, father, I ask pardon for the valet.

SILVIA : And why pardon ? I want him to go.

M. ORGON : His master shall decide. Let us go.

MARIO : Farewell, farewell, sister—no ill will !

(*M. Orgon and Mario go out*)

SILVIA : Ah, how oppressed my heart is ! I know not what mingles with the embarrassment I feel myself in ;

this whole adventure distresses me ; I suspect every face ; I am not pleased with anyone, not even with myself.

(Enter Dorante)

DORANTE : Ah ! I was looking for you, Lisette.

SILVIA : It was not worth finding me, for I am trying to avoid you.

DORANTE *(preventing her from leaving)* : Stop, Lisette ! I have to speak to you for the last time. It is a matter of consequence which concerns your masters.

SILVIA : Well, go and tell them about it ; I never see you without your troubling me ; let me go.

DORANTE : I offer you as much ; but listen to me, I say ; you will see things greatly altered by what I am about to tell you.

SILVIA : Well, speak then ; I am listening to you, since it is fated that my kindness to you is to be eternal.

DORANTE : Will you promise me secrecy ?

SILVIA : I never betrayed anyone.

DORANTE : The confidence I am about to place in you is only due to the esteem I have for you.

SILVIA : I believe it, but try to esteem me without telling me ; for it sounds like a pretext.

DORANTE : You are wrong, Lisette. You have promised me secrecy ; let us make an end. You have seen me greatly agitated ; I have not been able to prevent myself from loving you.

SILVIA : There we are ! I will take good care not to listen to you any further ! Farewell.

DORANTE : Stay : It is no longer Bourguignon who speaks to you.

SILVIA : And who is it then ?

DORANTE : Ah, Lisette, you will now realise the agitation my heart has felt !

SILVIA : I am not speaking to your heart, but to you.

DORANTE : Nobody is coming ?

SILVIA : No.

DORANTE: The course of affairs forces me to tell you ; I am too much a gentleman not to stop them on the way.

SILVIA: So be it.

DORANTE: Know, then, that he who is with your mistress is not what he is thought to be.

SILVIA (*quickly*): Who is he then ?

DORANTE: A valet.

SILVIA: And then ?

DORANTE: I am Dorante.

SILVIA (*aside*): Ah ! I begin to see more clearly into my heart.

DORANTE: In this disguise I desired to find out a little about your mistress before marrying her. My father, as I left, gave me permission to do as I have done and the result seems to me a dream. I hate the mistress, whose husband I was to be, and I love the servant who ought merely to have found in me a new master. What am I to do now ? I blush for her to say so, but your mistress has so little taste she is delighted by my valet, to such an extent that she will marry him if matters are allowed to go on. What is to be done ?

SILVIA (*aside*): I must conceal who I am . . . (*Aloud*): Your position is an original one, indeed ! But, sir, I must first of all make you my excuses for anything irregular I may have said in our conversations.

DORANTE (*quickly*): Hush, Lisette ; your excuses sadden me ; they force me to recollect the distance that separates us and only make it more painful to me.

SILVIA: Is your inclination for me so serious ? Do you love me as much as that ?

DORANTE: To the point of giving up all thought of another marriage since it is not granted me to unite my lot with yours ; and in this state the only consolation I could taste would be to think that you did not hate me.

SILVIA: A heart which has chosen me in my present situation is indeed worthy of my acceptance ; and I would

gladly reward it with my own if I did not fear to bring it into an attachment which would do it harm.

DORANTE: Are your charms insufficient, Lisette? Must you add to them the nobility with which you now speak to me?

SILVIA: I hear someone. Wait a little in the matter of your valet; things will not go so fast; we shall see each other again and we shall find some means of extricating you from the affair.

DORANTE: I shall follow your advice.

(He goes out)

SILVIA: Ah, I badly needed him to be Dorante!

MARIO: I was looking for you, sister. We left you in a state of uncertainty which troubles me; I should like to rescue you from it; listen to me.

SILVIA *(quickly)*: Ah, indeed, brother, there is very different news!

MARIO: What is it?

SILVIA: He is not Bourguignon; he is Dorante.

MARIO: Whom are you speaking of?

SILVIA: Of him, I say; I have just learned it. He has just gone out; he told me so himself.

MARIO: Who?

SILVIA: You do not understand me then?

MARIO: May I die if I understand a jot.

SILVIA: Come, let us go; let us find my father; he must know of this. I shall need you too, brother. I have changed my mind. You must pretend to be in love with me; you said something about it before when we were joking; but above all, keep my secret, I beg you.

MARIO: Oh, I shall keep it, for I don't know what it is.

SILVIA: Come, brother, come; let us lose no time. Nothing like this has ever happened before.

MARIO: I pray Heaven she is not raving!

END OF ACT II

ACT III

SCENE I

(Enter Dorante and Arlequin)

ARLEQUIN : Ah, sir, my most honoured master, I beg you . . .

DORANTE : Again !

ARLEQUIN : Have pity on my good luck ; don't bring bad luck on my happiness, which rolls on so well ; don't bar its way.

DORANTE : Why, you rascal, I believe you are making fun of me ! You deserve a hundred strokes of a stick !

ARLEQUIN : I do not refuse them if I have deserved them ; but when I receive them, allow me to deserve others. Shall I go and look for the stick ?

DORANTE : Scoundrel !

ARLEQUIN : Scoundrel, if you like ; but there is nothing in that to prevent my making my fortune.

DORANTE : The rogue ! What fancy has got hold of him ?

ARLEQUIN : Rogue is good too, it applies to me as well ; a scoundrel is not dishonoured by being called a rogue ; but a rogue may make a good marriage.

DORANTE : What, you insolent fellow, you expect me to leave a gentleman in this error and that I shall allow you to marry his daughter under my name ? Listen to me ; if you speak to me of this impertinence again, as soon as I have informed M. Orgon who you are, I shall dismiss you, you understand ?

ARLEQUIN : Let us come to terms. This young lady adores, idolises me. . . If I tell her I am only a valet and nevertheless her tender heart is still partial to marriage with me, will you not let the violins play ?

DORANTE : As soon as you are known, it matters nothing to me.

ARLEQUIN : Good ! I go at once to inform this generous person of my disguise. I hope we shall not quarrel for a coloured braid and that her love will bring me to the table, in spite of fate, which has placed me only at the side-board.

(Arlequin goes out)

DORANTE : Everything that occurs here, everything that happens to me here, is incredible. . . But I should like to see Lisette and know what success she has had in what she promised to do for me with her mistress to get me out of this difficulty. Let me see if I can find her alone.

(Enter Mario)

MARIO : Stop, Bourguignon, I have a word to say to you.

DORANTE : What can I do for you, sir ?

MARIO : You have been making love to Lisette ?

DORANTE : She is so lovable, it would be difficult not to speak to her of love.

MARIO : And how does she receive what you say to her ?

DORANTE : Sir, she jests at it.

MARIO : You are clever. Aren't you playing the hypocrite ?

DORANTE : No ; but how does this concern you ? Suppose Lisette should find her taste pleased by me. . .

MARIO : I find her taste pleased by him ! Where do you find your expressions ? Your language is very " precious " for a young man of your station.

DORANTE : Sir, I cannot speak in any other way.

MARIO : I suppose you lay seige to Lisette with these little delicacies ? They ape the man of quality.

DORANTE : I assure you, I ape no one ; but no doubt you did not come here for the purpose of showing me to be ridiculous and you have something else to tell me. We were talking of Lisette, of my inclination for her and of the interest you take in the matter.

MARIO : Why, Morbleu ! There is a tone of jealousy in your reply already ! Control yourself a little. Well, you were saying that suppose Lisette found her taste pleased by you. . . And then ?

DORANTE : And why must you know it, sir ?

MARIO : Ah ! there we are : Well, in spite of the light tone I adopted just now, I should be very sorry for her to love you ; without any more discussion I forbid you to continue your addresses to her, not that I am afraid she will love you, she seems to me to have too lofty a spirit for that, but it displeases me to have Bourguignon for a rival.

DORANTE : Faith, I believe you ; for Bourguignon, though he is only Bourguignon, is not pleased to have you for his.

MARIO : He will submit to it.

DORANTE : He will have to. But, sir, you love her very much !

MARIO : Enough to attach myself seriously to her as soon as I have taken certain measures. You understand what that means ?

DORANTE : Yes, I think I perceive what you mean. And on those terms you are beloved, no doubt ?

MARIO : What do you think, am I not worth the trouble of loving ?

DORANTE : You do not expect to be praised by your own rivals, I suppose ?

MARIO : There is good sense in that retort and I forgive it you ; but I am very mortified not to be able to say

that I am loved and I don't tell you this to account to you, as you may suppose, but I must speak the truth.

DORANTE: You surprise me, sir: Lisette does not know your intentions then?

MARIO: Lisette knows all the good I wish her and does not appear sensible of it, but I hope that Reason will win her heart. Farewell, retire from the contest quietly; her indifference for me in spite of all I offer her ought to console you for the sacrifice you will make me. . . Your livery is quite unable to make the balance swing in your favour and you are not made to contend with me.

(Enter Silvia)

MARIO: Ah! There you are, Lisette.

SILVIA: What is the matter, sir? You seem disturbed.

MARIO: It is nothing. I was merely saying a word to Bourguignon.

SILVIA: He is depressed; have you been scolding him?

DORANTE: The gentleman informs me that he loves you, Lisette.

SILVIA: That is not my fault.

DORANTE: And forbids me to love you.

SILVIA: Then he forbids me to appear agreeable to you?

MARIO: I cannot prevent his loving you, fair Lisette; but I do not wish him to tell you so.

SILVIA: He does not tell me so any longer, he only repeats it.

MARIO: At least he shall not repeat it while I am present. You may go, Bourguignon.

DORANTE: I wait for her to tell me.

MARIO: Well!

SILVIA: He says he is waiting; be a little patient.

DORANTE: Have you an inclination for this gentleman?

SILVIA : What ! Love ? Oh, I think it will not be necessary to defend myself against that.

DORANTE : You are not deceiving me ?

MARIO : Indeed, I am playing a pretty part here ! Let him go ! Whom am I speaking to ?

DORANTE : To Bourguignon, that is all.

MARIO : Well, let him go then !

DORANTE (*aside*) : This is unendurable.

SILVIA : Give way to him since he is angry.

DORANTE (*aside to Silvia*) : Nothing would please you better, perhaps ?

MARIO : Come, let us have an end of this.

DORANTE : You did not tell me of this affair, Lisette.

(*Dorante goes out*)

(*Enter M. Orgon*)

SILVIA : If I did not love that man, you must admit I should be very ungrateful.

MARIO (*laughing*) : Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

M. ORGON : What are you laughing at, Mario ?

MARIO : At the fury of Dorante who has just gone out and whom I forced to leave Lisette.

SILVIA : But what did he say to you in the little conversation you had in private with him ?

MARIO : I never saw a man more perplexed or in a worse humour.

M. ORGON : I am not sorry to have him caught by his own stratagem ; and besides, looked at properly, nothing could be more flattering and agreeable for him than what you have done up till now, daughter. But enough of this.

MARIO : But at what point is he precisely, sister ?

SILVIA : Alas ! Brother, I must admit I have every reason to be pleased.

MARIO : " Alas ! Brother ", she says. Do you feel the sweet contentment mingling with what she says ?

M. ORGON : Daughter, do you hope he will go so far as to offer you his hand while you are in your present disguise ?

SILVIA : Yes, my dear father, I hope so.

MARIO : What a baggage you are with your " dear father " ! You don't scold us now, you flatter us.

SILVIA : You overlook nothing I do.

MARIO : Ha ! Ha ! I am taking my revenge. You were so fastidious about my expressions just now ; and so in my turn I must tease you a little about yours ; your joy is quite as diverting as your uneasiness was.

M. ORGON : You will have no reason to complain of me, daughter ; I agree to anything it pleases you to do.

SILVIA : Ah, sir ! If you knew how greatly I am obliged to you ! Dorante and I were destined for each other ; he must marry me. If you knew how much I shall esteem what he does for me to-day, how my heart will retain the memory of the excess of affection he shows me ! If you knew how charming all this will make our union ! He will never be able to recollect our story without loving me ; I shall never think of it but I shall love him. You have founded our happiness for life by allowing me to act freely : our marriage is unique ; it is an adventure the very relation of which is moving ; this freak of fortune is the most singular, the most fortunate, the most. . . .

MARIO : Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! How your heart chatters, sister ! What eloquence !

M. ORGON : It must be admitted that the pleasure you are allowing yourself is charming, especially if you bring it to a successful conclusion.

SILVIA : That is as good as done ; Dorante is vanquished ; I await my captive.

MARIO : His chains will be more gilded than he purposes. But I think his mind is troubled, I am sorry for what he is suffering.

SILVIA : What it costs him to make up his mind only

renders him the more estimable to me ; he thinks he will offend his father by marrying me ; he thinks he is betraying his fortune and his birth. These are deep subjects for reflection ; I shall be charmed to triumph over them. But I must win my victory, he must not give it to me : I want a combat between Love and Reason.

MARIO : And may Reason perish in it !

M. ORGON : Which means you want him to feel all the extent of the folly he believes he will be committing ! What an insatiable vanity of self-love !

MARIO : That is the self-love of a woman and it is all of a piece.

(Enter Lisette)

M. ORGON : Hush ! Here is Lisette. Let us see what she wants of us.

LISETTE : Sir, you told me just now that you abandoned Dorante to me, that you gave his head up to my discretion : I took you at your word, I have laboured for myself and you will see that the work has been well done ; his head is in good condition. What am I to do with it now ? Does Madam yield it to me ?

M. ORGON : Daughter, once again, do you make no claim to him ?

SILVIA : No ; I give him to you, Lisette. I hand over to you all my rights, and, to speak as you do, I will never take a share in a heart I have not brought into condition myself.

LISETTE : What ! You will allow me to marry him ? You permit it too, sir ?

M. ORGON : Yes, let him put up with it. What does he love you for ?

MARIO : I give my consent too.

LISETTE : I too, and I thank you all.

M. ORGON : Stay : I must add one little restriction : to free us from responsibility in what is going to happen you must tell him a little of what you are.

LISETTE: If I tell him a little, he will know it altogether.

M. ORGON: Well, and is that head which is in such an excellent state unable to endure the shock? I don't think his is a character to be scared by that.

LISETTE: Here he is looking for me; be kind enough to leave me a free field. It is now a question of my master-stroke.

M. ORGON: That is true; let us go.

SILVIA: With all my heart.

MARIO: Come.

(M. Orgon, Silvia, and Mario go out. Enter Arlequin)

ARLEQUIN: At last, my queen, I see you and I shall not leave you again for I have suffered too much by having missed your presence; I thought you were dodging mine.

LISETTE: I must admit to you, sir, that it was partly so.

ARLEQUIN: Why! My dear soul, elixir of my heart, have you undertaken to end my life?

LISETTE: No, my dear, its duration is too precious to me.

ARLEQUIN: Ah! how those words fortify me!

LISETTE: And you ought not to doubt my affection.

ARLEQUIN: I wish I could kiss those little words, and gather them on your mouth with mine.

LISETTE: But you were urging me about our marriage and my father had not then given me permission to answer you. I have just spoken to him and I have his permission to tell you that you may ask him for my hand when you like.

ARLEQUIN: Before I ask him for it, allow me to ask you for it; I should like to return it thanks for its charity in consenting to enter mine, which indeed is not worthy of it.

LISETTE : I shall not refuse to lend it you for a moment on condition that you will take it forever.

ARLEQUIN : Dear round little, plump little, hand, I take you without bargaining ; I am not troubled by the honour you do me, but the honour I am to return you worries me.

LISETTE : You return me more than is necessary.

ARLEQUIN : Ah, no indeed ; you do not know that kind of arithmetic as well as I.

LISETTE : I look upon your love as a present from Heaven.

ARLEQUIN : The present it makes you will not ruin it ; a very paltry matter.

LISETTE : I think it only too magnificent.

ARLEQUIN : That is because you do not see it in full daylight.

LISETTE : You cannot think how much your modesty embarrasses me.

ARLEQUIN : Do not go to the expense of embarrassment ; I should be very imprudent if I were not modest.

LISETTE : But, sir, I must tell you that 'tis I am honoured by your affection.

ARLEQUIN : Oh, no ! I don't know where to begin.

LISETTE : Once again, sir, I know myself.

ARLEQUIN : Ah ! and I know myself as well ; and I haven't a wonderful acquaintance there, nor will you either, when you make it ; it is the very devil to know me ; you don't know what's at the bottom of the sack.

LISETTE (*aside*) : Such self-abasement is not natural.

(*Aloud*) : Why do you say that to me ?

ARLEQUIN : Ah, but that's the point.

LISETTE : But what ? You disturb me : can it be that you are not. . .

ARLEQUIN : Oh ! Oh ! You are pulling off my blanket.

LISETTE : I must know what this is.

ARLEQUIN (*aside*): I must prepare a way for this affair. . . (*Aloud*): Madam, has your love a robust constitution? Will it bear the fatigue I am going to give it? Does a poor lodging frighten it? I shall shelter it very poorly.

LISETTE: Ah, deliver me from this uneasiness. In one word, who are you?

ARLEQUIN: I am. . . Have you ever seen false money? Do you know what a bad louis is? Well, I am like that.

LISETTE: Come to the point. What is your name?

ARLEQUIN: My name! (*aside*): Shall I tell her my name is Arlequin? No: it rhymes too easily with *coquin*.¹

LISETTE: Well?

ARLEQUIN: Ah, dame! there is not much to extract here. Do you hate the character of a soldier?

LISETTE: What do you call a soldier?

ARLEQUIN: Well, an antichamber soldier, for instance.

LISETTE: An antichamber soldier? But am I not speaking to Dorante, then?

ARLEQUIN: He is my captain.

LISETTE: *Faquin*! ²

ARLEQUIN (*aside*): I couldn't avoid the rhyme.

LISETTE: See what an ugly brute he is!

ARLEQUIN: A pretty fall I have made!

LISETTE: And for an hour I have been asking pardon of him and exhausting myself in humbleness before that animal!

ARLEQUIN: Alas, Madam, if you prefer love to glory, I should be as profitable to you as a gentleman.

LISETTE (*laughing*): Ha! Ha! Ha! I cannot help

¹ *Rascal*. I have been forced to keep the French word here, to preserve the rhyme Arlequin—coquin—faquin, and in order not wholly to lose Arlequin's joke about the rhyme further on.

² *Scoundrel*.

laughing at him with his glory ! And there is no other course to take. . . Well, well, my glory forgives you ; it is well constructed.

ARLEQUIN : Are you serious, charitable lady ? Ah ! what gratitude my love promises you !

LISETTE : Shake hands, Arlequin ; I am duped ; the gentleman's antichamber soldier is quite worthy of the lady's-maid !

ARLEQUIN : The lady's-maid !

LISETTE : She is my captain, or the equivalent.

ARLEQUIN : Witch !

LISETTE : Take your revenge.

ARLEQUIN : See what an ugly creature she is and for the last hour I have been in confusion before her at my poverty !

LISETTE : Come to the point. Do you love me ?

ARLEQUIN : Pardi ; yes : changing your name does not change your face, and you know we promised each other fidelity in spite of all spelling faults.

LISETTE : Come, there is no great harm done, let us console ourselves with that. Let us keep silence about it and not give people a chance to laugh at us. Apparently your master is still in error with regard to my mistress : tell him nothing about it ; leave things as they are. I think he is coming in now. Sir, I am your servant.

ARLEQUIN : And I your valet, Madam. Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

(Enter Dorante)

DORANTE : Well, you have just left Orgon's daughter ; did you tell her who you are ?

ARLEQUIN : Pardi, yes. Poor child, I found her heart softer than a lamb ; it did not even breathe. When I told her that my name was Arlequin and that I wore a servant's clothes : " Well, my dear," she said, " Everyone has his name in this life, everyone has his clothes ; only yours cost you nothing." That is gracious, all the same.

DORANTE : What kind of a story are you telling me now ?

ARLEQUIN : So much of a story that I am going to ask for her in marriage.

DORANTE : What ! She consents to marry you ?

ARLEQUIN : She is pining for it.

DORANTE : You are imposing upon me ; she does not know who you are.

ARLEQUIN : Ventrebleu ! Will you wager that I don't marry her in her outdoor-cloak, in an old smock coat, if you provoke me ? I should like you to know that a love of my sort is not liable to breakage, that I don't need your frippery to thrust home my point, and that you have only to return me mine.

DORANTE : You are a knave. This is inconceivable and I see I must inform M. Orgon.

ARLEQUIN : Who, our father ? Ah, the good man, we have him under our thumb. He is the best of creatures, the best sort of a man. . . You shall tell me what you think of him.

DORANTE : Outrageous ! Have you seen Lisette ?

ARLEQUIN : Lisette ! No ; she may have passed in front of my eyes ; but a man of condition pays no attention to a chamber-maid : I give you my share of that attention.

DORANTE : Be off with you, your head is turned.

ARLEQUIN : Your little manners are rather informal, but then they are made by good society only. When I am married, we will live side by side.¹ Your maid-servant is coming.

(Enter Silvia)

Good-day, Lisette ; I recommend Bourguignon to you ; he is a young man of some merit.

(Arlequin goes out)

¹ " *But à but,*" side by side, on a level,

DORANTE (*aside*): How much she deserves to be loved! Why did Mario forestall me?

SILVIA: Where were you, sir? Since I left Mario, I have not been able to find you to tell you what I said to M. Orgon.

DORANTE: I was not far off, however. But what is the matter?

SILVIA (*aside*): What coldness! (*Aloud*): However much I depreciated your valet and appealed to his conscience to witness his small merit, however much I pointed out to him that the marriage might be delayed; he did not even listen to me. I must inform you that there is even talk of sending for the notary and it is time for you to reveal yourself.

DORANTE: That is my intention. I shall go away incognito and I shall leave a note informing M. Orgon of everything.

SILVIA (*aside*): "Go away"! That is not to my advantage.

DORANTE: Do you not approve of my idea?

SILVIA: Well . . . not wholly.

DORANTE: Yet I see nothing better to do in my present situation, unless I speak myself; and I cannot make up my mind to that. And I have other reasons for wishing to go; I have nothing more to detain me here.

SILVIA: As I do not know your reasons, I can neither approve nor combat them, and it is not for me to ask you what they are.

DORANTE: It is easy for you to imagine them, Lisette.

SILVIA: I think, for example, you find M. Orgon's daughter to your taste.

DORANTE: You see nothing but that?

SILVIA: Indeed there are other things I might suppose; but I am not mad and I have not the vanity to dwell on them.

DORANTE: Nor the courage to speak of them, for you

would have nothing agreeable to say to me. Good-bye, Lisette.

SILVIA : Take care ; I believe you do not understand me ; I am compelled to tell you so.

DORANTE : Admirably, and the explanation would not be favourable to me. Keep my secret until after I have gone.

SILVIA : What ! Seriously, you are going ?

DORANTE : You are very much afraid I shall change my mind.

SILVIA : How amiable of you to understand matters so well !

DORANTE : That is very ingenious. Good-bye. (*moves away*)

SILVIA (*aside*) : If he goes I shall cease to love him, I shall never marry him.

(*She watches him go*) : He stops though ; he reflects, he watches to see if I turn my head. I shall not recall him. . . . Yet it would be strange if he went after all I have done ! . . . Ah ! It is all over ; he is going ; I have not so much power over him as I thought. My brother is clumsy, he has gone about things in the wrong way : people who are not concerned in an affair spoil everything. I am much the better for his help ! What an end ! But Dorante reappears ; he seems to be returning ; I contradict myself then, I still love him. . . Let me pretend to go, so that he will stop me : our reconciliation must cost him something.

DORANTE (*stopping her*) : Stay, I beg you ; I have still something to say to you.

SILVIA : To me, sir ?

DORANTE : I find it hard to go without convincing you I am not wrong in doing so.

SILVIA : Ah ! Sir, of what consequence can it be for you to justify yourself to me ? It is not worth the trouble ; I am only a servant and you make me feel it.

DORANTE: I, Lisette? Is it for you to complain, you who saw me take my resolution and yet did not say a word?

SILVIA: Hum! If I wished, I could easily answer you on that score.

DORANTE: Answer then; I ask nothing better than to be deceived. But what am I saying? Mario loves you.

SILVIA: That is true.

DORANTE: You respond to his love, I saw it by your extreme anxiety for me to go just now: and so you cannot love me.

SILVIA: I respond to his love! Who told you so? I cannot love you! How do you know? You decide very rapidly.

DORANTE: Well, Lisette, by all that you hold dearest in the world, tell me about it, I beseech you.

SILVIA: Tell a man who is going!

DORANTE: I will not go.

SILVIA: Leave me. Come, if you love me, don't ask me questions: you fear only my indifference and you are but too glad I am silent. What do my feelings matter to you?

DORANTE: What do they matter to me, Lisette? Can you still doubt that I adore you?

SILVIA: No, and you repeat it so often I believe you; but why do you convince me of it? What am I to do with such a thought, sir? I will speak to you frankly. You love me; but your love is not a very serious thing to you. How many resources you have to get rid of it! The distance of rank between us, a thousand objects you will find on your road, the desire people will have to move your sensibilities, the amusements of a man of quality—everything will deprive you of this love you talk of to me so pitilessly. You will laugh at it perhaps when you leave here and you will be right. But if I remember it, sir, as I fear I shall, if it has struck home in me, what assistance

shall I have against the impression it has made on me ? What can atone to me for the loss of you ? How do you think my heart can replace you ? You must know that if I loved you, all that is greatest in the world would cease to move me. Consider then in what a state I should be left ; be generous and hide your love from me. I, who now speak to you, would be unwilling to tell you I loved you in your present state of mind ; the admission of my sentiments might expose your reason, and you can see I hide them.

DORANTE : Ah ! dear Lisette, what have I just heard ! Your words have a fire which pierces me ! I adore you, I respect you. Rank, birth, fortune, all disappear before a spirit like yours ; I should be ashamed for my pride to hold out against you, and my heart and hand are yours.

SILVIA : Indeed, do you not deserve that I should take them ? Must I not be very generous to hide the pleasure they give me ? And do you think it can last ?

DORANTE : Then you love me ?

SILVIA : No, no ; but if you ask me again, so much the worse for you.

DORANTE : Your threats do not frighten me.

SILVIA : And Mario---have you forgotten him ?

DORANTE : Yes, Lisette ; Mario does not alarm me ; you do not love him ; you could not deceive me ; your heart is true ; you respond to my tenderness, I cannot doubt it from the delight which seizes me ; I am sure of it, and you will never be able again to deprive me of that certainty.

SILVIA : Oh, I shall not try to ; keep it, we shall see what you will do with it.

DORANTE : You do not consent to be mine ?

SILVIA : What ! You will marry me in spite of what you are, in spite of your father's anger ; in spite of your fortune ?

DORANTE : My father will forgive me as soon as he

sees you ; my fortune is enough for two, and merit is as good as rank. Do not let us dispute about it, for I shall never change.

SILVIA : He will never change ! Do you know you charm me, Dorante ?

DORANTE : Do not hinder your tenderness any more then and let me reply. . .

SILVIA : At last I have reached the end : you . . . you will never change ?

DORANTE : No, dear Lisette.

SILVIA : What love !

(Enter M. Orgon, Lisette, Arlequin and Mario)

SILVIA : Ah, father, you wished me to be Dorante's wife ; come and see your daughter obey you with more joy than she has ever had.

DORANTE : What do I hear ? You her father, sir ?

SILVIA : Yes, Dorante. The same idea of observing each other came to both of us ; after that, I have nothing more to say. You love me, I cannot doubt it ; but you, in your turn, judge of my sentiments for you ; judge how much I value your heart by the delicacy with which I have tried to acquire it.

M. ORGON : Do you recognise that letter ? That is how I learned of your disguise, which she, however, only learned of from you.

DORANTE : I cannot express my happiness, Madam ; but what enchants me most is that I have given such proofs of my tenderness.

MARIO : Does Dorante forgive me the anger I caused Bourguignon ?

DORANTE : He does not forgive it you, he thanks you for it.

ARLEQUIN : Give you joy, Madam : You have lost

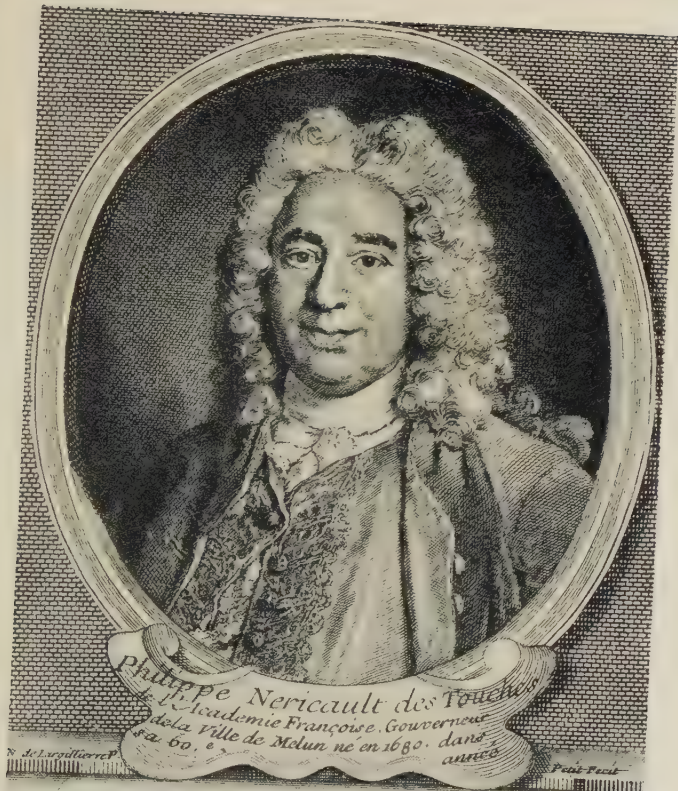
your rank ; but you have nothing to complain of since you retain Arlequin.

LISETTE : Wonderful consolation ! You are the only gainer in this.

ARLEQUIN : I don't lose by it. Before we found each other out, your dowry was worth more than you ; now you are worth more than your dowry. Then, skip, marquess !¹

¹ " Allons, saute, marquis ! " quotation from Regnard's *Le Joueur*, act iv., sc. x., xi., xii. It passed into a kind of proverb.

END OF ACT III



Tels sont les traits du moderne Térence
 Qu'Athènes et que Rome ont formé pour la France
 Dans ses charmans écrits l'esprit, le Jugement
 Les Graces, le bon goût, l'élégant-badinage
 Pour plaire et pour instruire unissent leur langage
 Et l'honête homme y joint le sentiment :

PHILIPPE NERICAUT DESTOUCHES.
 After a painting by N. de Largillierre.
 Engraved by Petit.

[Face p. 260.

PHILIPPE NÉRICAULT DESTOUCHES

I

The portraits of Philippe Destouches are uninspiring. Regnard's handsome face, Marivaux's curious turned-up nose, even Lesage's ugly honesty, all convey something to the gazer who hopes to get some suggestion of character from an author's features. Destouches does indeed express something, but this stolid square plump visage in its bagwig aureole suggests nothing more inspiring than eighteenth century virtue, that most heavy, self-complacent and tedious of all virtues. Just as we feel that Longfellow might have been a poet had he not been so damned virtuous, so Destouches, in spite of a youthful frolic or two, appears in all the dreary limitation of too much virtue of a narrow kind. He belongs to a generation which was in revolt against the immorality of the Regency ; in Marivaux this revolt took the form of delicacy and subtlety of feeling (as opposed to cynicism and heartlessness) ; in Destouches it became a kind of formal gush. From a literary point of view Destouches is the channel by which Addisonian common sense and virtue, deprived of their wit, lightness and charm, flowed into France.

Francois Néricault, his father, appears to have been a musician ; his mother was Gabrielle Binet. Philippe was baptised on the 9th April, 1680, at Tours ; he was educated in that town and at the College des Quatre Nations, in Paris. He left school in 1697, either just before or just after a family quarrel. All this part of his life remains exceedingly obscure and the biographers contradict

each other with all the gentle savagery of their race. Some say Destouches joined a troupe of strolling players and that he acquired his knowledge of the stage from this experience ; others say he became a soldier in the War of the Spanish Succession and fought in the campaigns of 1702 and 1703. His latest and most ample biographer (M. J. Hankiss) gives the year 1699 as the date when Destouches met the Marquis de Puyzieulx, the French ambassador at Soleure in Switzerland. He lived with the Marquis for seven years and owed to this nobleman his training in diplomacy. The ambassador's sister, the Marquise de Tibergeau, was one of the many women of the time who were disgusted by the tone of cynical debauchery of French society ; her influence upon Destouches was decisive. The fragment of a letter by Destouches which I am about to quote will show how he came to write plays and how firmly he had fixed in his mind the moral reform of comedy :

" One day we were reading the famous and inimitable novel of *Don Quixote* . . . and we came to the story of *The Curious Impertinent*. ' That would make an excellent subject for a comedy,' said Madame de Tibergeau, ' I have always wanted someone to try to put it on the stage. I have proposed it to hundreds of people and none of them has taken it up.'

" I was young and inexperienced ; I did not realise the difficulty of the undertaking . . . without hesitating, I took my pen in hand and went at it as best I could. . . At the end of five or six months my play was finished. . . ' Plays on words, licentious and libertine sallies, never please the polite [*honnêtes gens*]', I was told, ' however sharp and witty they may be. And yet the polite are only people you should try to please ; nothing becomes a gentleman [*honnête homme*] more. You are born to be one and your character should appear in your works.' A great truth which I have never forgotten. . . I reformed my play. . . I copied out the parts. . . I had a large number of rehearsals. . . Such was the origin of the troupe I formed from the principal persons in the Ambassador's suite."

' This is irrefutable evidence and shows that the " troupe of players " was simply one of the private theatres so

common among the upper classes in the eighteenth century. But the main points to notice are the part played as inspirer by the virtuous Madame de Tibergeau and the fact that even in his youth Destouches was looked upon as an "honnête homme"—a "man of politeness and piety." This episode occurred in 1704, but the Comedy "Le Curieux Impertinent" was not performed publicly until the 17th November, 1710, when it was given in Paris by the Comédie Française. Destouches must have had money from somewhere at this time, since for the next eleven years he was in France with no particular employment. But these were years of considerable activity in play-production.

In opposition to the anti-Molière movement of the time—in which Marivaux and La Motte bore a leading part—Destouches set himself up as a defender of "solid comedy." All his plays, it will be noticed, are formed on the receipt for comedy-making extracted by French critics from Molière's practice; obviously one had only to copy the external form of *Tartuffe* or *L'Etourdi*, substituting another "ruling passion" for that of hypocrisy or tactlessness, and there was a play as good as Molière's. So the public of the day seemed to think, for most of Destouches's plays were successful. The *Curieux Impertinent* was played for thirteen nights consecutively its first season; *Le Médisant* (1715) ran for sixteen nights. Encouraged by this considerable success, Destouches produced a number of other plays between 1712 and 1717. For some time he paid assiduous court to the Duchesse de Maine who lived at Scéaux surrounded by crowds of *littérateurs* whose task it was to entertain and flatter this restless little creature, one of the most intelligent and eccentric of the royal family. Destouches no doubt was a little trying to the Duchesse with his heavy virtue; she found the dry sparkle of Fontenelle more attractive. At any rate, Destouches found her an unsatisfactory patron and,

after wasting some time in producing private operas for the Duchesse, left Scéaux unrewarded and was afterwards heard to express doubts about the type of culture aimed at by her circle. In 1717 Destouches started on a fresh diplomatic career which was perhaps the most important influence in his life and art. In 1717 he went to London as secretary to the Abbé Dubois who, though not officially ambassador, was the agent trusted by the Duc d'Orléans with all really important negotiations. Reversing the traditional French policy, the Regent had determined upon friendship with England, but for some reason did not care to entrust this delicate business to the accredited ambassador. When Dubois returned to France and became chief minister, Destouches was left in London. His position was an awkward and miserable one. All important negotiations with the English government were secretly carried on by Destouches behind the ambassador's back, but naturally that gentleman was suspicious and made the life of his important subordinate as nearly impossible as he could. This was disagreeable enough, but to add to it the French government was so distressed for money that Destouches was always kept hard-up, often in real poverty. On one occasion a few hundred pounds given him by the English government alone enabled him to continue.

One anecdote of Destouches's diplomatic period in London has been preserved. The Archbishopric of Cambrai became vacant and the Abbé Dubois felt that his eminent virtues should be recognised by his occupying the episcopal throne of Fénélon. Apparently the Regent was not convinced, and the Abbé wished George I to intervene on his behalf. Destouches opened the matter to the King, who protested: "Has the Abbé reflected how ridiculous it is for a Protestant prince to ask for the disposal of a Catholic Bishopric? The Regent will simply laugh". "Sire", replied Destouches, "he will laugh,

but he will do it, because he will think it amusing and because of his deep respect for your Majesty ". The Abbé was made Archbishop, but it does not appear that Destouches received any reward for this diplomatic success.

More interesting to us is the fact that Destouches acquired an English wife, named Dorothy Johnstone, in 1723. This introduced complications. Mme. Destouches became a Catholic and for this and other reasons it was held necessary to conceal the marriage for a time. It was revealed inopportunately by an indiscreet sister-in-law, and this situation gave Destouches the plot of his *Philosophe Marié* which, written first in England and then greatly altered, was performed for the first time on the 15th February, 1727, with immense applause.

Meanwhile Destouches had been elected a member of the Académie Française, and went to Paris to be received into that body in 1723. Apparently it had been planned that he should return to England, but he never did so. He expected some substantial reward for his long and difficult diplomatic service, but at the critical moment the Regent and Dubois both died, and from the new government Destouches got nothing more than a pension of 4,000 livres. Yet, his son says he received 100,000 livres. At all events he bought an estate in the country in 1724 and lived there until 1729.

This opens the second part of his life as a writer of plays. After the great success of his *Philosophe Marié* he had a number of failures including the *Philosophe Amoureux*. But in 1732 he scored his greatest success with *Le Glorieux*—the play translated here, which had a first run of thirty performances, at that time a "phenomenal" number. Nine years later *L'Amour Usé*, over which he had spent a lot of effort, was a complete failure, and Destouches gave up the drama in disgust. He wrote numerous epigrams which he thought were better than his plays, and he projected a vast work, to consist of essays on ancient and

modern tragedies and comedies, including those of England, Spain and Italy ; but this was never completed. In January, 1754 we catch a last glimpse of him at his daughter's wedding. A few weeks later he died and was buried in the Church of Villiers en Bierre. His daughter died almost immediately afterwards.

The chief feature of Destouches's later plays—their moralising strain—is plainly the result of his long residence in England and the influence of English literature, especially of the moral plays of Addison, Steele, and Cibber. *The Spectator* particularly interested him and one of his plays, *La Belle Orgueilleuse*, is simply a *Spectator* expanded into a dialogue. Destouches was not ignorant of our earlier and greater drama, but he saw it through the eyes of his English contemporaries. He pillaged the English dramatists of the Restoration and earlier epochs, but always with that moralising tendency which makes him the true predecessor of the "tearful comedy" of the mid-eighteenth century. He translated *The Tempest* and Addison's *Drummer*. He took hints from Dryden's *Maiden Queen* and *Marriage à la Mode* for his *Irrésolu* ; from Congreve's *Old Bachelor* and *Double Dealer* for *La Fausse Agnès* ; from Beaumont and Fletcher's *Wit Without Money* for *Le Philosophe Marié* ; from *The Elder Brother* for *Le Philosophe Amoureux* and from *The Feigned Innocence* ; Etherege, Farquhar, and Middleton were also made use of by this enterprising foreigner. No English original of *Le Glorieux* has been suggested, in spite of these wide annexations from English drama. This makes all the more amusing the contention of one French critic who argues that Destouches learned little or nothing from the English drama but maintains that the character of Count Tufiere is obviously English, since "pride of this kind was never a French vice". Count Tufiere, it appears, is one of those haughty English lords who caused their countrymen to go in terror of their lives. Fortunately this is a

matter we are not compelled to decide. All we have to note is the undeniable fact that his residence in England gave Destouches that tone of exaggerated virtue which is pronounced in his later plays.

II

The original plan of *The Conceited Count* (*Le Glorieux*) humiliated this gentleman far more than the present text allows. The play was altered by Destouches because Quinault-Dufresne, who was the actor cast by the Comédie Française for the part of the Count, resolutely refused to play unless the humiliations of the Count were softened. By an amusing but unfortunate coincidence, Quinault-Dufresne was himself a most conceited individual ; he would not act a part in which his favourite vice was too heavily censured. So the poor dramatist had to re-write his play. The result of this is to make the end of the play conventional and ineffective ; and the final remark of Lycandre—that his son may be conceited but has a good heart—is one of those specimens of bathos which are eagerly collected by those who feel a perverse glee in really bad literature. The inordinate length of the first two preparatory acts is a defect ; so is the false sentiment of Lisette and Lycandre. All the characters are carried dangerously near to caricature. The modest Philinte, who is so easily disposed of, is enough to disgust any one with modesty, and his excessive self-depreciation certainly seems far less natural than the Count's excessive conceit ; but perhaps that is because there are many more people in the world like the Count than like Philinte.

But this play is by no means devoid of merit. Though the whole romantic story of Lycandre and his children is improbable to a degree, the introduction of romance into the somewhat dessicated body of French comedy was at least commendable. If we can free ourselves of pre-

conceived notions of what a play ought to be and enjoy the romantic comedy of Beaumont and Fletcher, then we can forgive Destouches for putting on the stage a story which has such evident lapses from probability. This rather feeble essay in romance is grafted on to a Molièresque comedy of character. And these two points make the literary importance of Destouches. He revived the tradition of Molière and at the same time he tried to introduce qualities from the English drama which the comedy of France lacked. Unfortunately, he had small critical discernment; he thought Addison and Steele greater dramatists than Shakespeare and Jonson and the models which affected him were precisely those English plays formed in imitation of Molière, not in the school of Shakespeare. He took from the English writers their facile and conventional sentiment, not their vigour and imagination. The bad results of this are apparent in the "tearful comedies" of Nivelle de la Chaussé, who followed in the steps of Destouches. But Destouches had a dramatic sense, and there are several very dramatic scenes in the play. The main theme is the struggle between the old *noblesse* and the new class of wealthy bourgeois. Lisimon is a more respectable Turcaret; he is still loose and vulgar but not criminal. In twenty years people have got used to him, accept him as a necessary evil, even take some pleasure in seeing him humiliate the proud but necessitous nobility. To be "Lord of a million crowns" may not be so honourable as to hold the moneyless title of a forgotten crusader, but it is a title more appreciated by most people. The little touch about the purchase of a marquisate for Valere will be enjoyed by those who like to note the eternal repetition of the social comedy.

There is one other point to be noted in this play, though it concerns only the student of French; and this is Destouches's style. This is a distinct decline from the excellence of the earlier plays. The style of Regnard and Lesage

has still all the strength, beauty and intelligence of the classic French. Marivaux has lost sobriety and measure, but he retains elegance and precision ; if he tends to the over-elaborate detail of preciosity, his taste and sincerity save him from worse faults. But the style of Destouches is definitely bad ; it has over-emphasis, ready-made phrases, conventional turns of language, a platitude of expression unworthy a French writer. The medium of translation blurs these distinctions, but it must be insisted that in the matter of style the gulf between Lesage and Destouches is very great. Lesage is still under the discipline of the " grand siècle " ; Destouches is already the decadence. To blame this upon his English models is manifestly unfair ; it is due to that complex condition of things which inevitably results in a decline after a great period. The magnificent thing about French literature is its power of recovery from temporary decadence ; for the vitality of the race is unquenchable.



THE CONCEITED COUNT

Comedy in Five Acts

By PHILIPPE NÉRICAUT DESTOUCHES

Represented at the Comédie Française
for the first time, on the 18th January,

1732

PERSONS

LISIMON	a rich bourgeois who has bought a title
ISABELLE	Lisimon's daughter
VALERE	Lisimon's son
COUNT TUFIERE ¹	Isabelle's lover
PHILINTE	another lover of Isabelle's
LYCANDRE	an unknown old man
LISETTE	Isabelle's waiting-woman
PASQUIN	the Count's valet
LAFLEUR	the Count's lackey
M. JOSSE	a notary
A lackey of Lycandre's	
Several lackeys of the Court	

SCENE: At Paris, in a furnished house ; Count Tufiere has apartments there, as well as Lisimon and his family.

¹ " All-pride."

THE CONCEITED COUNT

ACT I

(Pasquin)

PASQUIN : Lisette has not come ; I think the baggage wanted to make fun of my person just now when she gave me a rendezvous here. I shall go—Ah ! faith, here she is.

(*Enter Lisette*)

LISETTE : My dear Monsieur Pasquin, I am your servant.

PASQUIN : Most humble servant to the amiable maid of an amiable mistress !

LISETTE : So neat a compliment deserves long thanks on my part, but I lack eloquence to carry them out ; you must be contented with this curtesy. I have kept you waiting.

PASQUIN : To speak without disguise, my queen, you do come a little late to the rendezvous.

LISETTE : I should have liked to come a little sooner.

PASQUIN : Once I was active and hated to wait ; nothing could calm my excited desires ; but age has put a curb on my vigour.

LISETTE : And so you have become reasonable ?

PASQUIN : And very much ashamed of it.

LISETTE : Ashamed of being praiseworthy ?

PASQUIN : Yes, of being so with you and I read in your eyes that I should please you more if I were less reasonable.

LISETTE : Me ? I should avoid you if you were less discreet.

PASQUIN : Now I understand ; I see what you mean. You think me too old to be your favourite and you will make an honest husband of me. I feel I have a fund of patience for the title, which you may experience.

LISETTE : You are very much deceived ; for I want to make neither a husband nor a lover out of you.

PASQUIN : What do you want with me then ? What object brings us together ?

LISETTE : I want us to take council together.

PASQUIN : What about ?

LISETTE : About your master and my mistress.

PASQUIN : Well ?

LISETTE : Let us discuss the matter and conceal nothing. If we both agree to help them, we can both be useful to them, I think.

PASQUIN : Your idea is a good one ; it pleases me.

LISETTE : So much the better.

PASQUIN : Your master the Count is cold and serious ; he has lived with us three months now and I have not been able to talk a quarter of an hour with him. What is his character ? Between ourselves, I can see my mistress loves him ; and yet I think he cannot reckon on her affection very long ; for, with all her wit, good sense, modesty, graces, attractions, she has not the gift of loving with constancy. Before loving, they say, one should know a person thoroughly, for love is treacherous. Now Isabelle loves before she knows ; but her inclinations cannot so completely blind her that it conceals a lover's faults from her eyes. She looks for them carefully and finds them without trouble and so after some efforts her victory is certain ; ashamed of her device, she withdraws her heart, and coldness soon succeeds to ardour ; when she is at the very point of marriage, she breaks it off.

PASQUIN : An agreeable character, upon my word. A

tender and inconstant heart, an active mind, ardent to the point of folly and yet prudent ; a coquette into the bargain.

LISETTE : No ; not capricious and not coquettish and above all not crafty. She loves tenderly and in all good faith ; but it does not last. Now tell me all the qualities of the Count, your master. I want to understand him, to serve him the better. Without knowing why, I like him ; and you will see the results of it to-day. If he has any faults, let us prevent my mistress from perceiving them and so fix her tenderness upon him ; but tell me what they are, to put me in a position to act so that marriage precedes their discovery.

PASQUIN : Now I know your plans I shall speak fearlessly, and I shall paint him for you from head to foot. His good qualities shall be my first point ; his faults my second. I will not conceal from you that I shall be very brief on the first ; very long on the second. First, Count Tufiere is a real title, and his air of grandeur is natural ; he is undoubtedly of noble birth.

LISETTE : The result of chance. Go on.

PASQUIN : All France agrees as to his bravery and among soldiers he is greatly esteemed as a man of tried courage. His uprightness is proverbial. Although he is sharp and petulant, his heart is good. There is my first point.

LISETTE : Come straight to the second.

(Enter Lafleur)

PASQUIN : Ah ! is that you, Lafleur ? What is the Count doing ?

LAFLEUR : Gambling ; and, what is more, successfully ; for he is fleecing a downright provincial who is at least as silly as he looks brutal. While he swears and laments,

our master pockets his money without saying a word.

PASQUIN : Why did you come so soon ?

LAFLEUR : Because of a purpose I had.

PASQUIN : What purpose ?

LAFLEUR : I have come to ask you for my discharge.

PASQUIN : Me ?

LAFLEUR : Certainly. As far as I can see you are our master's factotum. One dares not speak to him for fear he will grow angry and consequently I address myself to you.

PASQUIN : You surprise me, Lafleur ; I thought you had better sense. To serve the Count is a great advantage ; why leave him ? Enlighten me on this point.

LAFLEUR : Because you talk too much and he never talks at all.

LISETTE : A curious thing and a new complaint.

LAFLEUR : My dear young lady, such as you see me—you will not credit it—I am taken for a fool. In three months my master has not said a word to me.

PASQUIN : What does that matter to you ?

LAFLEUR : Why ! What does it matter ? Should he treat his servants in that way ? If I am in his room all day he doesn't condescend even to scold at me ; and for him I left the best mistress . . . She wanted us to talk and talked ceaselessly herself. I was never bored there. Every day she abused us each in turn before it was daylight. It was a real pleasure.

LISETTE : Then you want to be scolded ?

LAFLEUR : I don't object so long as I can answer back. Answering is speaking. That's life at any rate. But, there ! With the Count I never even say yes or no. He never utters one poor syllable. Oh ! I would just as soon live with an Arab. It dries me up, it exasperates me, me who gladly give my opinion about everything. Silence kills me and . . . Why are you laughing ?

LISETTE : Go on.

LAFLEUR (*crying*) : If I stay here I shall burst.

LISETTE (*to Pasquin*) : How much I like his frankness and naturalness !

LAFLEUR : On the word of a footman of honour I speak the truth.

PASQUIN : Our master makes his servants keep silence ; but they feel the effects of his magnificence—well fed, well dressed and generously paid.

LAFLEUR : All that is not contentment to me.

LISETTE : Well, he has to talk ; that is his whim.

LAFLEUR : Otherwise I should give way to melancholy. I once had a master whom I deeply regret and no longer serve, seeing he is dead. He was not very useful to me, fed me badly and paid my wages badly ; never any profits, and sometimes in winter he let me go nearly as naked as a worm : but I liked him. Why ? Because he made me laugh, and on my side I could say anything to him. He called me his dear, his friend, his companion ; and we both lived like fellows. But as to the Count, the deuce if I like him ! He is always formal, shut up in himself, always sailing along as proud as a Scotchman. I can't endure him, to tell you the truth ; and even if he enriched me, devil take me if I want to serve a master like him.

PASQUIN : Patience ; he'll grow accustomed to your face and one day you'll see, he will speak to you. But don't be impatient ; wait for the proper time. I have been in his service ten years and only dare to speak to him occasionally.

LISETTE (*to Pasquin*) : I pity this poor young man. Arrange it so that at least a few words are said to him.

LAFLEUR : Why, I would rather have two words than two pistoles.

PASQUIN : I will do my best.

LAFLEUR : Well, there's no middle path ; either I must be spoken to or dismissed. Good-bye. That is my last word, I warn you. And I shall speak even if I get no reply,

(Goes)

PASQUIN : Like you, I am sorry for poor Lafleur.

LISETTE : And so Count Tufiere is a proud nobleman ?

PASQUIN : That is my second point.

LISETTE : Very good.

PASQUIN : His habit is to be always aloof with servants. He would think he had lowered himself, if he said a word to one ; and if a valet speaks to him, he is dismissed. To sketch his portrait in two words—he is the most conceited man ever produced by nature. He is filled with an offensive scorn for his inferiors and he assumes an air of importance even with his equals ; he is so proud of his ancestors, so proud of his nobility, that he thinks himself the only one of his kind here below. Moreover he is convinced of his abilities, decides everything authoritatively, thinks he has supreme merit in everything, disdains everyone else, admires himself ; in a word, of all mortal beings he is the most imperious, the most consequential, the most conceited.

LISETTE : Ah ! how we shall laugh !

PASQUIN : At what ?

LISETTE : His display, his pride, his haughtiness are a perfect contrast to the qualities of his humble rival, who is afraid to speak for fear of speaking ill, blushes like a girl out of timidity ; and although very rich and of a noble family is always grovelling, fearful, wary, profuse of excessive civilities, full of deference for the meanest servants and never speaking except with low bows.

PASQUIN : Yes, faith ! the contrast is perfect, and we shall see very curious results. This gentle rival is Philinte, no doubt ? My master will put him to flight with a glance.

LISETTE : But is this proud Count very rich as well ? He seems to be.

PASQUIN : Rich ? No, thanks be to God, for sometimes that lowers his conceit ; if my memory serves me, all his income is derived from his pension and from his regiment. But he knows all kinds of games and gambles

successfully ; that is how he keeps up such magnificent appearances.

LISETTE : And are you making anything ?

PASQUIN : Yes, by my craft. He sometimes takes liberties with me. I sulk, he smiles. My pre-arranged ill humour, a cold and abstracted air, a few brusque words, bring him to the point I want. He tries to soothe me, to calm my mind with three or four pistoles ; and, as I have a good heart his money touches me.

LISETTE : You have given me information and I shall now tell you something. The Count will soon ruin his own chances with Isabelle ; yes, you can be certain of it, unless he conceals his haughty character. She is of a friendly, affable and sociable humour ; in her eyes pride is an unendurable vice ; in spite of the great fortune assured her, her air and speech are simple, measured, polite, engaging and full of modesty.

PASQUIN : So much so that she is badly matched with my master.

LISETTE : He will be dismissed, if he doesn't control himself. Give him that advice.

PASQUIN : He is proud to such a degree. . .

LISETTE : I heard a noise. I think it is our old master. Don't leave me alone with him.

PASQUIN : That old fox ! Is he so dangerous ?

LISETTE : At fifty-five he is more of a libertine than all our young men ; and what surprises me is that his son Valere has all the virtue and wisdom of a father.

(Enter Lisimon)

LISIMON : *(running up to Lisette)* : Good-morning, child ! Give me a kiss—why, you run away.

LISETTE : You should reserve your transports for your wife.

LISIMON : Bah ! You're joking, I suppose ? I've just

returned from the country, and hurried here, full of impatience to see you. . . What young man is this ? Alone together ? I don't like that. I will wager you are not so lofty with him ?

LISETTE : We were speaking of Count Tufiere, his master.

LISIMON : The nobleman who has just been proposed for my daughter ?

PASQUIN : Yes, sir.

LISIMON : From what they write me, I am very much inclined to accept him as a son-in-law ; he is praised, and I am given to understand he is a man of honour of the first quality. But is he quick, alert, heedless, well set up, a man of the town ? I want all that for my daughter.

PASQUIN : You have drawn his portrait ; that is just where he shines.

LISIMON : Good. Does he enjoy his food, and drink deep ?

PASQUIN : The deuce he does, he's the best in his regiment. He achieved his masterpiece in Germany, in Switzerland.

LISIMON : He's the man I want. The other must decamp.

LISETTE : Who ? Philinte ?

LISIMON : Himself. It's useless for him to cajole me. He's a man who puts water in his wine ; an insipid creature with his discreet manners ; he gives me the stomach-ache with his cringes. My son-in-law a water-drinker ! 'Sdeath, if he was a prince, I should refuse him. We shall see a pretty game ; they say my wife intends him for my daughter. Does she know I am the head of my family, absolute monarch of her and my children ? That I mean to dispose of them ? But is she in the house ?

LISETTE : Yes, sir.

LISIMON : You will tell my dear wife she must go to the country this evening.

LISETTE : And why ?

LISIMON : Why ? Because I'm here. A pretty question !

LISETTE : But . . .

LISIMON : In this house we are pinched for room, too near each other ; they are working hard to rebuild our own. My house is to be vast and I shall take great care our apartments are far apart, so that even though we are under one roof we shall live together without knowing it.

LISETTE : I will see if Madam is visible.

LISIMON : No, no ; I have something to say to you. And you may go, my man. Go and look for your master carefully ; we must make acquaintance at once.

LISETTE : His master is just returning.

PASQUIN : And I am waiting for him here.

LISIMON : Go and wait for him outside—off with you.

(Pasquin goes)

LISIMON : Thank Heaven, now we are alone together, and my strong affection . . . Where are you going ?

LISETTE : To my mistress. She is calling me.

LISIMON : No.

LISETTE : You don't hear her ?

LISIMON : I ? Not a bit.

LISETTE : I hear her and I must go at once.

LISIMON : Let her wait.

LISETTE : Do you want me to be reprimanded, sir ?

LISIMON : Who would dare to, here ? Everyone shall look on you as their mistress and respect you as myself—wife, children, servants, all shall obey you.

LISETTE : Obey me, sir ? What are you thinking of ?

LISIMON : My little queen, you shall be the sovereign of my heart and my possessions.

LISETTE : Your language is obscure—I don't understand it.

LISIMON : Let me explain. Charmed with your beauties I have determined to make your fortune. To get rid of an importunate mob of people I mean to set you up magnificently, but privately. In the evening I will come and sup with you in secret. I will bear all the expenses

of your servants as well as of a swift and handsome coach : clothes, ornaments, you shall have them all ; my heart will forestall every wish you can form. Now do you understand.

LISETTE : Yes, sir, very plainly.

LISIMON : And I suppose what I say tickles your ear ? What do you say to these proposals, my dear ?

LISETTE : I cannot accept your proposition without consulting a very kind lady whom I honour.

LISIMON : And who is she ?

LISETTE : Your wife.

LISIMON : What the devil—my wife !

LISETTE : Yes, sir, if you please ; she takes an interest in what concerns me ; and I have no doubt she will be delighted to see me embrace this quiet kind of life.

LISIMON : Are you joking ?

LISETTE : I shall also consult my mistress, and your son. I imagine all three will be edified by the care you take of a poor orphan, will be touched to see that you hold out a helping hand to set her yourself on so excellent a path and that even at your age your charity shines to the extent of ruining them in order to provide for a girl.

LISIMON : You take that tone ?

LISETTE : Yes, sir, I do take it. Learn, I beg you, to understand people : a heart like mine scorns riches when they are to be bought with such degradations.

LISIMON : Oh ! Since my love, my offers, my words are of no effect on you, I intend . . .

LISETTE (*running away*) : Help !

LISIMON : What, you baggage, insult me in this way !

(*Enter Valere*)

VALERE : (*running in*) : What is the matter, father ?

LISIMON : Nothing.

VALERE : Are you ill ?

LISIMON: No. I'm quite well. What do you want?

VALERE: Who? I? There was a cry for help, and with a natural apprehension I ran here at once.

LISIMON: You take too much trouble. Lisette is all I need.

VALERE: But . . .

LISIMON: The sight of you disturbs me; go away!

VALERE: I leave you in this urgent heed! Certainly, I shall not. Lisette, I will take care of my father; go quickly, tell my mother to come here immediately.

LISIMON: I don't want her, you villian!

LISETTE: I will go.

LISIMON: Stay here. (*To Valere*): And you, go away at once.

VALERE: If that is all that is needed to please you, Lisette shall stay; but I swear to you I will not leave you at this juncture. You are too agitated. Your eyes are on fire. I fear some accident. Sit down a little. I see you are tired with your journey. At your age you must look after yourself a little more. Shall I send for a doctor?

LISIMON: Be silent. (*Aside*): Knave, you shall pay for this!

(*Goes*)

LISETTE: You see.

VALERE: Yes, I see what an unworthy excess my father aims at. What an example for me! What a grief for my mother! I am not surprised that her weak health obliges her to give up society and that she passes her life in her appartments, entirely given over to melancholy.

LISETTE: I must leave this place.

VALERE: No, no, have no fear. After all, we can defend you from my father.

LISETTE: I know it; but I must go, I tell you.

VALERE: Think how I am pained by what you say! Yes, if you leave us, I shall die of grief. You know my plan.

LISETTE: It would make my happiness if it could be carried out, but it is impossible. I feel the terrible distance between us. A real marriage is what I aim at; you promise it, but I await it in vain. Every day, every instant destroys my hope. Your parents are powerful; an immense fortune must cause you to aspire to the most noble of wives; consider how ill-matched we are.

VALERE: Love makes all things equal, and my mind sees in you what will make my life's happiness.

LISETTE: Remember I possess nothing, do not even know my parents.

VALERE: Wit, grace, beauty—they are your wealth, your titles, your parents.

LISETTE: Do you flatter yourself, Valere, that your father will consent to our marriage?

VALERE: We will dispense with his consent.

LISETTE: Yes, you; but not I.

VALERE: I can, secretly.

LISETTE: No, no, you cannot fill me with false hopes. I have told you I must have a proper wedding, and I shall take care not to run the risk. . . .

VALERE: You have nothing to fear and . . . What does this old man want?

LISETTE: Although he appears very poor, his wisdom is profound; he is the only friend I have left in the world. For nearly two years this virtuous friend, sensible of my needs, prompt, generous, makes it his principal business to aid me; I find him a salutary guide. Leave us a moment, if you please.

VALERE: Gladly. But come soon and join me in my sister's room. (*Goes*).

(*Enter Lycandre*)

LYCANDRE: At last I see you again. This happy meeting transports me with delight.

LISETTE: I am very happy that you have found me again in the condition I am..

LYCANDRE: What are you doing here?

LISETTE: I do what I can to conceal it from myself, but . . .

LYCANDRE: What?

LISETTE: I am in service here.

LYCANDRE: Just Heaven! And it was for this base employment you left the convent without warning me?

LISETTE: At one time you often came there to see me, but for some time you neglected me. Moreover my mother is dead. Uneasy, in distress, hearing nothing of you, without hope, without support, what resource had I in this cruel difficulty? The daughter of this house, now my mistress, my convent-friend, seeing my grief, kindly offered as she was leaving to take me into her service. She made me a solemn promise that I should be rather her friend than her maid-servant; I could not resist her pressing offer. It was not without shedding many tears, but my fate willed it—and so there are my troubles.

LYCANDRE: O cruel fortune! And have they kept word with you? By proper respect . . .

LISETTE: Yes.

LYCANDRE: That consoles me for so sad a happening, which I should have prevented, had I not been detained by my infirmities for nearly six months in the distant retreat where I myself lead a hard enough life. And so you are happier to-day?

LISETTE: As much as one can be in the service of others.

LYCANDRE: Alas!

LISETTE: You sigh! In my sad experience a vague hope sustains and reassures me. I have lost none of my gaiety.

LYCANDRE: Your hope is well-founded. The wished-for moment may soon arrive. Fortune grows weary of persecuting you. But tell me, please, to whom were you speaking when I came in?

LISETTE: To the son of the house. If you knew him you would esteem him highly.

LYCANDRE: Then he has your esteem? You blush!

LISETTE: Who? I? Do you make it a crime in me to do him justice?

LYCANDRE: He is young, handsome, rich. Does he often see you?

LISETTE: Yes, indeed, often.

LYCANDRE: You are young, amiable, and inexperienced; these are all snares.

LISETTE: Reassure yourself. My heart is above my condition. I have sure principles for any event.

LYCANDRE: I rely upon them. But what does this young man say to you?

LISETTE: His name is Valere.

LYCANDRE: Good Heavens, what does it matter to me whether his name is Valere or Cleon? I want to know what he says to you.

LISETTE: That he loves me.

LYCANDRE: Is that all?

LISETTE: Yes.

LYCANDRE: All?

LISETTE: Yes, I say.

LYCANDRE: You are deceiving me.

LISETTE: But . . . your reproach hurts me. Well, then, to hide nothing, this young man offers to marry me secretly, if I will consent.

LYCANDRE: Secretly! He is trying to put you off your guard.

LISETTE: No, I will answer for him. But, far from yielding, while I accept his heart, I refuse his hand unless his parents approve his design. I am only too sure they will reject it; and so, to avoid an outcry, sir, I conjure you to take me away from here to-morrow, this very evening, in order that Valere and I may not see each other again.

LYCANDRE: O truly worthy a less rigorous fate! What

you ask is a clear sign of your prudence and virtue. I must reveal to you what I have kept silent. You can aspire to Valere's hand and even marry him, with his father's consent.

LISETTE: I, sir?

LYCANDRE: I say more; as soon as they know you, they will think themselves happy to form such a bond, and respecting your noble birth, will solicit such an alliance.

LISETTE: You jest at me. Why was my mother so careful to conceal what I was until her death? Is my father alive?

LYCANDRE: He lives, he loves you, and will himself come to take you away from this place.

LISETTE: But why did he abandon me so long?

LYCANDRE: You shall know his reasons. But remain here until he reveals himself and keep all this silent. That is essential.

LISETTE: I of noble birth? Ah! I shall not believe you, unless you explain the whole mystery.

LYCANDRE: No, I have said enough. To know the rest you must wait for your father. Farewell. But tell me, does Count Tufiere live here?

LISETTE: Yes, he has lived here some months.

LYCANDRE: I must speak to him.

LISETTE: Ah, sir, I fear he will receive you very ill in your poor clothes; for he is said to be so fiercely proud . . .

LYCANDRE: I know how to abase him.

LISETTE: He will insult you.

LYCANDRE: I have thought of a way to correct him. Until then, good-bye. Remember that noble birth gains its finest lustre from the sentiments of the heart; there are sure means of displaying them, and if cruel fate has deprived you of wealth, envying your share of a greater treasure, be rich in virtues—they are your superiority.

ACT II

LISETTE (*alone*) : Ought I to rejoice or to be anxious ? What Lycandre has said to me is very apt to flatter my little vanity, and yet the more I think of it, the less likelihood there appears in his discourse. The old man was probably jesting at me. But no, he loves me too much for that. I think I detect his little ruse—he wants to make me proud, so that I shall think myself superior to Valere ; by this device the clever old man arms vanity against love. Yes, yes, when all is weighed up, I am convinced of it. I am very soon dispossessed of all my grandeur ; once more I am Lisette ; and the fate averted . . . poor Lisette ! Alas your reign was short. I have slept and dreamed a happy dream, but awake to my sad condition.

(*Enter Valere*)

VALERE : I waited vainly for you. What ! Alone and out of the way ! What are you doing ?

LISETTE : Thinking.

VALERE : That old man who came to see you must have told you something disagreeable.

LISETTE : On the contrary.

VALERE : And what was the reason of your thinking ?

LISETTE : A fact which ought to delight me and yet it is precisely that which grieves me.

VALERE : Oh ! ho ! Upon my word, this is most surprising.

LISETTE : You will think me mad from what I am about to tell you ; and yet this is perhaps the result of an excess of discretion.

VALERE: I don't understand you. Explain this mystery.

LISETTE: I am forbidden to, yet I cannot be silent, and although I have been commanded discretion I feel that I can keep nothing secret from you. With difficulty I support a wearisome burden.

VALERE: Yield to the temptation, I beg you.

LISETTE: I think it is the best way to get rid of it; but if I tell you, you will laugh at me.

VALERE: What! can you . . .

LISETTE: Swear that you will not mock me, whatever I say.

VALERE: I swear it.

LISETTE: My frankness, or if you prefer, my indiscretion forces me to this precaution. Moreover, you can enlighten me in a doubt which torments me. Now listen.

VALERE: I am listening.

LISETTE: The old man said . . . Are you going to laugh at me?

VALERE: No, no, I say, no.

LISETTE: Before I explain any further, Valere, allow me to ask you a question. Reply frankly and without flattery.

VALERE: Well?

LISETTE: Do you think I have that air of quality given by birth and education? Do you think my features, my manners, my speech fit to uphold the part of a noblewoman?

VALERE: On such a point a lover is an unreliable judge; but from the first you inspired me with respect and veneration. What produced them? Your rank? Your property? Would to Heaven it were so! I sigh when I see the condition to which fate has reduced you; but it tries in vain to abase you. Whatever parents you may have come from, everyone remarks in you at first sight an air which is striking and unmistakable. What I say, everyone says.

LISETTE : This is flattering, but is it sincere ?

VALERE : Yes, on the word of a gentleman.

LISETTE : Then, Valere, learn what I have just been told, which is very sweet to me because its effect will touch you also. For important reasons I am soon to know, my rank has been concealed from me. I have the honour to descend from a noble and illustrious family, if there has been no attempt to delude me.

VALERE : No, you have been told the truth, I assure you ; I will swear to it.

LISETTE (*laughing*) : Very well !

VALERE : I beg you, charming Lis . . . O Heaven ! I do not know how to name you, but I beg you if you still love me to be certain that you have been given a very just idea of yourself ; and permit love, jealous of your rights, to offer you the first homage that is due you. (*Kneels*)

LISETTE : Rise, Valere, you confuse me.

VALERE : What ! You act as servant to my sister ! Ah ! I blame myself for having been so slow in opening her eyes ; she might run the risk of not being sufficiently respectful to you. . . My father distresses me and I know my mother sometimes takes too severe a tone with you. I will go and inform my family and I fear . . .

LISETTE : Ah ! Here is my secret in very good hands ! Above all things I am forbidden to make myself known. If you say a word to anybody, far from aiding me . . .

VALERE : Well, I will be silent. I am so delighted. . . yes, I will restrain myself, have no fear.

LISETTE : Hush ! hush ! I see Isabelle.

(*Enter Isabelle*)

VALERE (*running to meet her*) : Isabelle, I have great news to tell you.

LISETTE (*checking him*) : Ah ! What a scatter-brain you are !

VALERE: My heart cannot restrain itself. I shall go. Good-bye.

ISABELLE: Good-bye! are you joking? Tell me what this great news is, Valere.

VALERE: Oh, nothing.

ISABELLE: Why, Valere, are you making fun of me?

VALERE: No, no. When you hear . . .

LISETTE (*whispers to Valere*): Go away!

VALERE (*goes and then comes back*): Isabelle, when you speak to Lisette . . .

ISABELLE: Well?

VALERE: Always be respectful to her . . .

ISABELLE: Respectful?

VALERE: Yes. This lady—I mean Lisette, has certainly a right to demand from you and from all . . . Good-bye.

(*Goes hurriedly*)

ISABELLE: I do not know what to think of such vague talk. What do you say about it? I think my brother is raving.

LISETTE: Something of the kind.

ISABELLE: I respectful to you! That is going a little far; this kind of talk is suspicious. Now then, will you agree with what I imagine?

LISETTE: What?

ISABELLE: My brother is in love with you. Oh! yes, yes, I guess right; your embarrassment confirms my suspicions.

LISETTE: And if he did love me, would that be a crime?

ISABELLE: No, but . . .

LISETTE: If I am to believe him, he thinks me pretty. But there! I don't believe a word of it!

ISABELLE: Why?

LISETTE: The mere sallies of a young man who knows

how to flatter, and without loving anything, attacks every heart he can.

ISABELLE: No, my brother is none of those flighty coxcombs who go offering their homage from one woman to another. I know how upright and sincere he is. If he says he loves you, it is the truth.

LISETTE (*quickly*): What! Seriously?

ISABELLE: Yes, the thing is certain. I see that what I say does not pain you. Ah! my dear!

LISETTE: What?

ISABELLE: I can easily perceive it.

LISETTE: What? What do you perceive?

ISABELLE: My brother is your lover, and my brother assuredly does not love an ingrate. You have a high heart and a delicate spirit.

LISETTE: Here is the fact. He says that if I were not what I am . . .

ISABELLE: Well?

LISETTE: He thinks so highly of me it would make his life's happiness to obtain me as his wife.

ISABELLE: And then? You ponder! Lisette, I open my mind to you on all occasions; imitate me. What do you reply to him? Answer truthfully.

LISETTE: Why, I reply to him . . . You are exceedingly curious.

ISABELLE: Go on.

LISETTE: That I should be happy if I were a person who would be fitting for him. That is all.

ISABELLE: I believe it; but I fear for the future; your love will make you both unhappy.

LISETTE: You have your idea and we have ours.

ISABELLE: What do you mean?

LISETTE: Some day I will enlighten you. But don't be concerned for your brother. Don't be alarmed about my risks, but come to what concerns you.

ISABELLE: Willingly.

LISETTE: You know the state of my heart ; let us talk a little of yours. It is uncertain, delicate, often a prey to change. How is it now ?

ISABELLE: Badly.

LISETTE: I am glad—it is very absorbed, then ?

ISABELLE: Yes, Lisette, so much so that it will be, for ever.

LISETTE: Oh ! Don't let us swear to that.

ISABELLE: I would take an oath of it.

LISETTE: From which Heaven preserve you !

ISABELLE: Why ?

LISETTE: Your mind has always in reserve its " ifs " and its " buts ", which sooner or later insinuate themselves into your heart in spite of its ardour. The Count indeed has a delightful look and his merit corresponds to it—at least I suppose it does—but you have only seen him for a few moments, you know very little about him. And that is why I foresee that before a week is over, in trying to understand him better you will be struck by some defect in him.

ISABELLE: That cannot be ! He is an accomplished man. My heart is so filled with his perfections that it is shielded from my fastidiousness. If he has a fault, it is lack of tenderness. He seldom comes to see me.

LISETTE: He is a man of sense ; to be wished for is to be loved long ; the man who sees us too often soon sees that he wearies us.

ISABELLE: You always excuse him. But please tell me, do you see no faults in him ?

LISETTE: Who ? I ? Not the least.

ISABELLE: So much the better.

LISETTE: But if he has any, I think they will not escape your sight for long ; and that is so much the worse for you. Have you resolved to take none but a man perfectly accomplished in every respect ? Such a man is a phoenix among men—not to be found. If the Count is

that rare miracle in your eyes, believe your heart ; let it be your oracle ; put the mind aside, follow sentiment. If it deceives you, at least it does so agreeably. Sometimes it is well to blind oneself and very often error is supreme happiness.

ISABELLE : I am resolved to follow your advice.

LISETTE : You will thank me that you have followed it. But what will happen to our poor Philinte ? His merit once made some impression on your heart.

ISABELLE : I know that he bores me to death. I esteem him very much and I cannot endure him. How can this go on ? All his conversations consist of gazing or bowing ; as soon as he speaks, he stumbles, he is lost ; in a word, although he has wit he is generally taken for a fool.

LISETTE : Here he is.

ISABELLE : What does he want ?

LISETTE : He has come to furnish matter for panegyric to your critical mind.

(Enter Philinte)

PHILINTE *(from the side of the stage, after several bows)* : Madam . . . I greatly fear I am intruding.

LISETTE *(to Isabelle)* : The man has the gift of prophecy.

ISABELLE : A man such as you . . .

PHILINTE *(redoubling his bows)* : Ah, Madam ! . . . If I intrude, pray punish me.

ISABELLE *(curtseying)* : Sir . . .

PHILINTE : Do me the honour of dismissing me.

ISABELLE : You should think better of my civility.

PHILINTE *(bowing)* : Madam, in truth . . .

ISABELLE *(returning the bow)* : I both esteem and regard your person . . . *(aside to Lisette)* : Help me, my dear.

LISETTE *(after several curtseys to Philinte, presents him with a chair)* : Will you be pleased to sit ?

PHILINTE (*quickly*): What are you suggesting? Heavens! One should kneel to Madam Isabelle!

LISETTE: As you please, sir. (*To Isabelle*): Say something to him.

ISABELLE: I don't know what to say.

LISETTE: Very well—the conversation begins to be brilliant. (*to Philinte*): Sir, I perceive that you prefer not to speak in my presence. I will retire.

PHILINTE (*detaining her*): No, it is unnecessary. Here I desire only to admire in silence.

LISETTE (*to Philinte*): You are content to speak to her only with your eyes?

PHILINTE: I never tire of it.

LISETTE: Speak as much as you like, nothing interrupts you.

ISABELLE (*to Lisette*): Oh! I am out of countenance.

LISETTE (*to Isabelle*): Well, ask him a question; he will reply, I think.

ISABELLE (*aside to Lisette*): Think of some question yourself.

LISETTE (*aside to Isabelle*): It is for you to open the conversation.

ISABELLE: (*to Philinte, after having thought a little*) What sort of weather is it, sir?

LISETTE (*aside*): Interesting topic!

PHILINTE: Madam . . . indeed . . . the day is charming.

ISABELLE: Sir, indeed . . . I am delighted.

LISETTE: And I; I am charmed too, indeed. But is the conversation already over? Let me employ my genius in starting it again. Is there any news? (*aside*): He will speak at last.

ISABELLE: Have you heard anything of the new opera?

PHILINTE: It is spoken of rather disparagingly.

LISETTE (*aside*): The man is laconic enough.

ISABELLE (*to Philinte*): What do you disapprove of? The verse or the music?

PHILINTE: I know very little of music and I write bad verse; and so I may judge quite awry. Moreover I admit I very often give my support to the worst productions; an author, whoever he may be, seems to me to deserve that we should deign to accept his efforts.

LISETTE: But they say criticism is useful to authors.

PHILINTE: Criticism is easy and art is difficult. This is what produces the race of censors and narrows the talents of authors. (*To Isabelle*): But you are not listening, you seem in pain.

ISABELLE: I can bear it no longer.

PHILINTE: Good God! What is it?

ISABELLE: A headache.

PHILINTE (*rushing away*): I will go at once.

ISABELLE (*detaining him*): No, stay.

PHILINTE: What an excess of graciousness!

ISABELLE: But I will go. I fear my pain may distress you. I am suffering agonies.

PHILINTE: I am in despair. Let me take you in. (*Putting on his gloves hastily*): Madam, will you be pleased to give me your hand?

ISABELLE: I have not the strength. Good-bye until to-morrow.

PHILINTE: At what hour, Madam?

ISABELLE: Ah! sir, at any hour. But I beg you will not follow me. (*Goes*)

PHILINTE (*to Lisette*): I remain to say a word to you.

LISETTE (*in embarrassment*): Sir . . . indeed . . . I have a headache too. Be so kind as to take no notice of my impoliteness . . . and my duty calls me to my mistress. (*Philinte gives her his hand and leads her in*)

PHILINTE: That headache came very suddenly! Undoubtedly I gave it to her. It is my timidity, which I cannot overcome, renders me ridiculous. I have just had proof

of it. How unfortunate I am ! Why have I not the chatter and the impertinence of young courtiers ! Whoever founds himself on such models will never find women cruel.

(Enter a lackey, badly dressed)

LACKEY : This letter is addressed to you, sir, I think.

PHILINTE *(reads)* : To Count Tufiere. It is not for me ; but he lives here.

LACKEY : Pray excuse me.

PHILINTE *(bowing to him)* : Ah ! sir ! *(aside)* It is to him I am sacrificed. Madam Lisimon will not consent to it and I must speak before I go. *(Goes)*

(Enter Pasquin)

LACKEY : Hola ! One of Count Tufiere's men !

PASQUIN *(arrogantly)* : What do you want.

LACKEY *(aside)* : 'This man talks loftily enough !

PASQUIN : Speak.

LACKEY : Is your name Pasquin ?

PASQUIN : Himself, indeed. But learn, rascal, that the word " sir " does not hurt the mouth.

LACKEY : Sir, I am in confusion ; the reproach wounds me. I did not know you were to be called " sir " ; but you teach me and I gladly assent.

PASQUIN *(importantly)* : No more compliments.

LACKEY : Will you give the Count, your master this little note ?

PASQUIN : Hand it over. Who from ?

LACKEY : On this point I must be silent. It is from an unknown person who gives no name. Good-bye, sir. Although my ignorance has caused me to be lacking in deference to you, sir, you will see hereafter from my careful behaviour that I am full of respect for you, sir. *(Goes)*

PASQUIN : That bumpkin was bantering me and I begin

to suspect he was not wrong. After all, the airs I give myself approach impertinence, sufficiency, foppery, and taking it altogether, I am a booby ; but for that poor lad I should have mistaken myself and puffed myself out as proudly as my master. A conceited man is a silly animal ! But I hear a disturbance. Ah ! here is the original of my grand airs with his head in the air. My borrowed glory ends with his arrival.

(The Count enters, walking with large strides and his head in the air. His six lackeys stand respectfully at the back of the stage, Pasquin is a little in front of them)

COUNT : Impertinent fellow !

PASQUIN *(presenting the letter)* : Sir . . .

COUNT *(still walking)* : Fop !

PASQUIN : Sir . . .

COUNT : Silence. A mere bumpkin fly into a passion in my presence ! Disrespectful to me over a mere four hundred pistoles !

PASQUIN : He's wrong.

COUNT : Hem ! To whom are those words addressed ?

PASQUIN : To the bumpkin.

COUNT : So be it. But in lower tones, if you please. Your remarks do not interest me. Take this and lock it up. *(Gives a fat purse)*

PASQUIN : Peste ! how plump it is ! I feel my soul moved by so charming an object. *(Opens the purse and takes out several coins)*

COUNT *(seeing him)* : What are you doing ?

PASQUIN : I want to see if the gold is full weight.

COUNT *(taking back the purse)* : You are too curious. *(Makes several signs, and, as he makes them, his lackeys wait on him. Two bring up a table, two others an armchair ; the fifth brings an inkstand and pens, the sixth paper ; he begins to write.)*

PASQUIN: Sir, I think that without being disrespectful I may give you this letter which has just been handed to me for you?

COUNT (*continuing to write after taking it*): Ah! is it from the little duke?

PASQUIN: No; a man came . . .

COUNT: Then it is from the princess?

PASQUIN: It is from an unknown person who gives no name.

COUNT: And who brought it to you . . .

PASQUIN: A badly dressed lackey.

COUNT (*throwing him the letter*): Enough; read it and give me a report on it. You understand.

PASQUIN: I understand. (*He reads the letter to himself*)

COUNT (*still writing*): Master Pasquin . . .

PASQUIN: Sir?

COUNT: Send the servants away.

PASQUIN (*in a conceited way*): You may go.

LAFLEUR (*to Count*): Sir . . .

COUNT: What?

LAFLEUR: May I presume to say . . .

COUNT: He speaks to me! Ha! Let him retire; and dismiss him.

PASQUIN (*to Lafleur*): I told you so. Go away and I will try to calm his mind.

(*Lackeys go*)

(*The Count re-reads what he has written and Pasquin reads the letter*)

COUNT (*after reading what he has written*): You shall not go; it is degrading for men of my rank to be excessive in politeness. A man like me would dishonour himself if his pen wrote "Monseigneur" to anyone. No, my little lord, you shall not have the glory of gaining such a victory over mine. You could assure me a very complete happiness, but if it is at this price, I am your servant.

(*Tears the letter*) Take away this table. Well, what does the letter say?

PASQUIN: It runs on a certain theme, sir, which will not please you.

COUNT: Why? Read it.

PASQUIN: You order it, but . . .

COUNT: Oh! no more talk.

PASQUIN (*reads*): "He who writes to you" . . .

COUNT: Who writes to you! The style is very familiar.

PASQUIN: It will heat your spleen. (*Reads*): "He who writes to you and takes an interest in you, sir, warns you without fear or scruple that your behaviour, which irritates him, will make you very ridiculous."

COUNT (*getting up abruptly*): If I had the fop here who dares to write to me thus . . .

PASQUIN: Shall I go on?

COUNT: Yes, let us see the end of it all.

PASQUIN (*reads*): "You are not deficient in merit but" . . .

COUNT: You are not deficient! Ah! indeed, so I believe. Fine praise, in speaking of a man like me!

PASQUIN (*reads*): "You are not deficient in merit; but far from believing yourself an astonishing prodigy, learn that everyone is irritated by your impertinent pride" . . .

COUNT (*giving Pasquin a buffet*): What do you mean, rascal?

PASQUIN: Very good; a priceless trait! Am I responsible for what is written to you? Devil take the writer and his truths! (*Throws down the letter*)

COUNT: Ah! I will teach you! . . .

PASQUIN: What! You ill-treat me for other peoples' faults? If I ever undertake to be your reader again . . .

COUNT (*giving him the purse*): Must I tell you a second time to lock up this money? Here, take my key and be quick.

PASQUIN (*goes and returns*): Do you know how much it amounts to?

COUNT: No, not exactly.

PASQUIN: I will account to you for it. (*Aside*): I will pay myself for that blow with my own hands. (*Goes*)

COUNT: May I become the vilest of mankind if I spare the person who has done me this injury! Let me see if I can recognise the hand-writing. (*Reads*): "The friend from whom this useful lesson comes to you borrows a strange hand"—he does well!—"but he only hides his name from you to give time for your over-proud soul to yield to reason alone; this evening he himself will come simply to you to see if your lofty humour has lowered its tone." (*Throwing down the letter*): A bold person upon my word! If he comes he shall pay dear for such an outrage. Who can have written me this outrageous libel? The more I think of it . . .

(*Enter Pasquin*)

PASQUIN: Sir, I have counted the money.

COUNT: It comes to . . . ?

PASQUIN: Three hundred and ninety pistoles.

COUNT: But . . .

PASQUIN: If you find but two obols more I am a coxcomb.

COUNT: But I won four hundred pistoles, I am certain of that.

PASQUIN: Either you deceive yourself or I am deceiving you. And you do not think money would corrupt me?

COUNT: Master Pasquin!

PASQUIN: Sir?

COUNT: You are a rogue.

PASQUIN: I respect you too much to say "No" but . . .

COUNT: That is sufficient.

PASQUIN : Yes. Let us speak of Isabelle. You are growing cool to her, it seems to me. At least, she complains of it.

COUNT : She knows my love. I have spoken ; that is enough.

PASQUIN : Her father has returned.

COUNT : It is for him to come and offer me his daughter.

PASQUIN : Why, sir, would you have the father of a family make the first advances ?

COUNT : Yes, sir, I would have it. A man of my rank should exact everything from them.

PASQUIN : Assume a less disdainful manner ; Lisette told me . . .

COUNT : A petty fault-finder, who talks about everything and says nothing.

PASQUIN : She reasons rather well for a fault-finder.

COUNT : And what does she say ?

PASQUIN : She says that Isabelle has a mortal hatred for conceited persons ; and that in her eyes, rank, high quality, lose much of their lustre where pride reigns.

COUNT (*rising*) : What do you say ?

PASQUIN : I ? Nothing. It is Lisette. I hope . . .

COUNT : Someone is coming ; see who it is.

PASQUIN : Faith, it's the father-in-law.

COUNT : I was certain he would do his duty.

PASQUIN : You should get up and go to receive him.

COUNT : I believe this scoundrel is trying to show me how to behave ! Go and bring him in ; and I will follow you.

(Pasquin goes)

(Re-enter Pasquin with Lisimon)

LISIMON (*to Pasquin*) : Is Count Tufiere in, my friend ?

PASQUIN : Yes, sir, there he is. (*Count rises carelessly and takes one step towards Lisimon, who embraces him*)

LISIMON : Dear Count ! Your servant !

COUNT (*to Pasquin*) : Dear Count ! We have become great friends, it appears.

LISIMON : Faith, I am delighted that we are living under the same roof.

COUNT (*coldly*) : I too am glad.

LISIMON : Parbleu, we'll drink deep. You drink hard, they say ? And I yield to no one. I am impatient to fill your glass, and it shall be soon. But are you ill ? From your cold look, your sombre greeting . . .

COUNT : (*to Pasquin, who brings a chair*) : Give this gentleman a seat . . . No, offer him the armchair. He will not take it, but . . .

LISIMON : Excuse me, sir, since you offer it, permit me to make use of it ; let me stretch out in it ; I am quite without ceremony, my dear fellow, and this should be a lesson to you. I want all ceremony between us banished forever from this moment. And now, my dear boy, will you come home with me ? We shall all be delighted to dine with you.

COUNT : Are you speaking to me, sir ?

LISIMON : Who else, pray ; Pasquin ?

COUNT : So I believed.

LISIMON : Really ? I wager a little vanity made you think that ?

COUNT : No. I am little accustomed to such manners.

LISIMON : Oh, you'll get used to them, my boy. Do you suppose I shall form mine from yours, at my age ?

COUNT : You will be good enough to attempt it.

LISIMON : Ah, but with me the inside governs the outside. I am frank.

COUNT : And I like politeness.

LISIMON : And I don't like it ; it's a deceiver which often makes people say what they don't believe. I hate and avoid people who pretend to be fastidious, whose lofty grandeur grows concerned over nothing, who are afraid

one will grow familiar with them. My maxim is that among friends little deviations should be allowed.

COUNT: One distinguishes between friends.

LISIMON: Oh, I don't.

COUNT: Men of my birth are a little fastidious about distinctions, and I am only friendly upon these conditions.

LISIMON: Oh! Ho! You take a pretty high tone! Now listen to me, my dear Count. If you play the lofty so much it will not suit me. My daughter pleases you, according to what I have been told; she is rich, she is beautiful, she is witty; you please her; I agree to it from the bottom of my soul, especially as I thus contradict my wife who wants to get me a son-in-law from a compliment-maker who never says a word but it is insipid. But if you want me to be your father-in-law, you must come down a peg and alter your manner. If not, no bargain.

COUNT (*rising abruptly, to Pasquin*): I shall take him at his word.

PASQUIN: You will bite your fingers for it or I am a fool. Will you lose your fortune for a false point of honour?

COUNT: But if . . .

LISIMON: In a word, all constraint annoys me. It is time for dinner; well, are you coming? We shall have leisure to discuss our arrangements; but let us begin by drinking. Strong thirst, good appetite, but above all no conceit; that's my motto. People make themselves at home with me; live as you please—that's our only rule. Come, don't sniff at me like that; when you enter our house, leave your grandeur at the door.

(*They go*)

PASQUIN: And that's a pretty fall for my conceited Count! His haughtiness needed a teacher like that, in faith. If this man doesn't make him amenable, then there's no cure for his pride.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

(Enter Count Tufiere and Pasquin)

COUNT : Yes, although I rarely speak to my servants I am willing to debase myself for a moment in secret and to condescend so far as to confide in you. I have had proof of your attachment to me and I see you are attentive to all my interests. You will be charmed to learn what progress I have made.

PASQUIN : I see you have got hold of the father-in-law.

COUNT : He adores me at present.

PASQUIN : I am delighted to hear it.

COUNT : I hope that when he knows me better he will respect me, and I warrant he will correct himself.

PASQUIN : At any rate you performed wonders to win him over, you emptied close upon two bottles with such imperturbable boldness that your future father-in-law was enchanted.

COUNT : He has just sworn to me that I shall be his son-in-law. His daughter was delighted and gave me to understand how cordially her heart acquiesced in what he said ; and by a tender glance I was willing to share the pleasure she showed.

PASQUIN : What an excess of kindness !

COUNT : If her father has control, the matter will proceed rapidly. The old fellow is struck by my air of grandeur ; he restrains his humour and hardly dares call me " thou " already.

PASQUIN : There's a man who knows your deserts, but may I be clubbed if you succeed in making him polite.

COUNT : And why ?

PASQUIN : Because he is old and has formed his habits. Moreover he feels that his immense wealth is at least equal to high birth.

COUNT : He would like to have it thought so, but he does not himself believe it. I see clearly, I am sure, that in spite of all his wealth he feels the need of acquiring lustre by purchasing the glitter of a noble alliance. That is the ambition of these new men. Avarice is first their ruling passion ; but when it is satisfied they change their objective and purchase honours when their fortune is made. Lisimon, a new noble, son of a fortunate father, who loaded him with wealth but could not satisfy his wishes, yearns to graft himself upon the old nobility ; and no doubt his daughter has the same weakness. A man such as I am flatters their vanity, and this should make me redouble my pride. I want to take advantage of my right of birth and to bring them to the humble deference they owe to my blood ; I shall give them to understand by what I say that my father is still in that brilliant, proud and magnificent state which so long upheld our old nobility and persuade them that in the matter of wealth, which forms all their pride, I do not yield to them at all.

PASQUIN : But might they not discover the contrary ? An old servant of your father's once related to me the cruel mischances which happened to him ; and perhaps . . .

COUNT : Time has caused them to be forgotten. Moreover, the province, where my father once kept a prince's state, is so far from Paris that these people can never have heard anything of our adversities. If your discretion . . .

PASQUIN : Believe me . . .

COUNT : No speeches ! Results shall speak.

PASQUIN : Dispose of my tongue ; I shall govern it as you think fit.

COUNT : You will be asked about the condition of my property. Without going into details, reply boldly that

my fortune at least equals my birth ; above all, persuade Lisette of it. That is the surest means of establishing it as a fact, for she has influence with the whole family.

PASQUIN : Faith ! you should treat the girl carefully ; she wishes you well, according to what I am told.

COUNT : I cultivate the influence of a lady's maid ! I should have to blush too much for such a degradation. I consent to your using your skill upon her, without saying that it is with my consent ; I approve this intercourse, it is fitting from her to you. Someone is coming ; go, and above all play your part well.

PASQUIN : Oh ! we're brave enough when it is a question of telling lies !
(Goes)

(Enter Isabelle and Lisette)

ISABELLE : I find you at the right moment and my father consents to our having a moment's conversation. He intends me for you ; the matter is serious.

COUNT : And I dare flatter myself it is not doubtful, and that my happiness will be confirmed to me by you. Dare I pretend to this happiness ? I burn to hear the charming avowal.

LISETTE : I know what she thinks and indeed I believe you have cause to be satisfied, sir.

COUNT *(to Isabelle, after gazing at Lisette disdainfully)* : Ah ! Do me the honour of replying yourself.

LISETTE : Sir, a woman does not say " I love you ", but to keep silence at this juncture is to reply plainly enough to your question.

COUNT *(to Isabelle)* : Do you never speak but through an interpreter ?

ISABELLE : Since she is my friend and very discreet . . .

COUNT : Your friend ?

ISABELLE : Yes, sir,

COUNT: This girl is in your service, is she not?

ISABELLE: It is true; but is it not pleasant for me to have in her an amiable companion, whose society makes my life agreeable?

COUNT: What! Lisette lives in your society? I did not think you were so excessively kind.

ISABELLE: And why not, sir?

COUNT: Everyone has his own way of thinking, but for my part . . .

LISETTE (*aside*): Count 'Tufiere is frankly haughty; I had been told so.

ISABELLE: I think she has a good heart, joined to wit, sincerity, friendship, zeal; I cannot make her too great a return for them. Indeed . . .

COUNT: Has your father fixed the day when I am to receive the reward of my love?

ISABELLE: You go a little too fast, and perhaps we ought to know each other a little better before we are married, examine our feelings closely, and not depend upon the first impulses. It is nothing that we have an inclination to be united, this inclination must be founded upon esteem. And . . .

COUNT: To speak frankly, I expected from you less caution and more alacrity. I thought my merit such that your heart would second your father's proposal with sincere ardour and that, seeing me urge on our wedding, you would do me the honour not to hesitate.

ISABELLE: And I thought I deserved at least for reputation's sake that you would do me the honour not to think so much of yourself; that, presuming less upon your person, you would appear less certain that you must be loved. And this gratifying doubt, which could not harm you, would kill a suspicion I should like to destroy.

COUNT: And what suspicion is that, if you please?

ISABELLE: The suspicion of a fault whose effect would act against you only too soon. (*Enter Valere*)

VALERE: Am I to believe, Isabelle, what I have just learnt?

ISABELLE: What?

VALERE: That you are to marry Count Tufiere?

COUNT: I dare to suppose, sir, that her plan will have your approval?

VALERE: I think . . .

COUNT: And you may congratulate me. (*Moves to go*) I should be very flattered by it. I shall rejoin your father to give him my word and conclude the matter.

VALERE: You may find some difficulty.

COUNT: I, sir?

VALERE: I fear so.

COUNT: Will you have the kindness to let me know from what it might arise?

VALERE: But, . . . my mother, perhaps.

COUNT: Your mother!

VALERE: Yes, sir.

COUNT (*laughing*): That would be amusing.

ISABELLE: He assumes a very insufferable air to my brother.

COUNT: And does she not know that I adore Isabelle and that a mutual friend has proposed me as her husband?

VALERE: Pardon me, sir, she does.

COUNT: You amaze me.

VALERE: Why?

COUNT: I had relied on her being on my side. I had imagined my rank, my birth, deserved her respect, her deference; that many other reasons I might allege, if I were so vain as to boast, would make your mother incline to me. But I was wrong, I see. What is to be done? Perhaps I am too prejudiced in my own favour. Yes, I have some fault which I do not know of, and, far from being offended or irritated by scorn, I never blame anything but my own lack of merit.

VALERE: What? We scorn you? By seeking my sister, sir, you certainly do us an honour.

COUNT (*with a disdainful smile*): Oh, Heavens, not the least !

VALERE: But, to speak openly, my mother has for a long time inclined to Philinte ; she has even some understanding with him ; friendship and esteem are its bases.

COUNT (*in a tone of raillery*): Oh ! I can believe it. Philinte is a wonderful man.

VALERE: No. But he is an estimable man. Although he is not young, he could still be loved. He is wealthy without pride . . .

COUNT: You will alarm me by the brilliant portrait you are about to make of him. I begin to feel I am rash to enter into competition with such a rival, although I have been told he is a mere eccentric. Yes, yes, my eyes are opened. My figure, my age, all that is praised in me, are but a weak advantage as soon as I am compared with Philinte ; it is wronging him to hesitate.

LISETTE (*to Isabelle*): What ! Are you not surprised at this humble reply ?

ISABELLE: I am not deceived by it and in my opinion this modesty is only pride in disguise.

COUNT (*to Isabelle*): Madam, it was in vain I proposed myself as your husband. My ardour was too rapid and too heedless. I am opposed by a rival I must respect.

ISABELLE (*smiling*): Philinte will dispense with your respect.

COUNT (*bowing*): He does me too much honour.

VALERE: But you must not be offended—he has a hundred respectable qualities. Moreover, the more we try to convince him of it, the more modest he grows. He is silent about his rank, his condition.

COUNT: And does very wisely ; for, without prejudice, he would be a little mistaken to boast his birth.

VALERE: He is a real gentleman.

COUNT: People are good enough to think so.

VALERE: And, moreover, he proves it.

COUNT : Faith, that is all he can do. He will not convince men like me ; and without exaggeration I dare to boast that I am an enemy of presumption, that if Philinte were a man of quality, belonging to any considerable family, we should not have any such dispute about him, for he would certainly be known to me. But hitherto his name has never reached me—a proof that his title is of recent date.

VALERE : That is not what the world says.

COUNT : The world flatters him. For instance, sir, you knew my name before you saw me ?

VALERE : I protest I did not.

COUNT : So much the worse for you, sir. For the name of Tufiere does not come from a mere county estate but from a famous castle. In a hundred places history speaks of my ancestors and records their exploits. Deign to run over it and you will see who we are and that among my vassals I have three hundred gentleman of better family than Philinte.

VALERE : Ah, sir, I believe it.

COUNT : Men of quality know it better than I ; for my part I say nothing about it ; one must be modest.

VALERE : You do well ; pride . . .

COUNT : I detest it. The great lose always by self-glorification and nothing befits them more than humility. You are going ?

VALERE : Yes, sir, I must go, and I leave enchanted by your modesty.

COUNT (*holding his hand*) : Are we good friends ?

VALERE : It is a great honour for me and I . . .

COUNT : Parbleu ! I am your humble servant. If you see Philinte, pray persuade him not to force me to give way to him. He would do better to renounce all hope of marrying your sister and to avoid seeing her. Tell him I think he will have the prudence not to compel me to any violence, for I declare to you in express terms if he carries

off the prize from me, we shall meet each other at close quarters.

VALERE: I can tell you nothing about this matter, sir, but I understand your meaning and will take care he is informed. (*Goes*)

ISABELLE: You treat your rivals with great contempt.

COUNT: In my opinion nobody should be surprised at it. I am not proud, but to speak openly I am disgusted to see Philinte opposed to me; such a rival is not made, I think, to impede the wishes of a man like me.

ISABELLE: "Of a man like me"! That is a surprising expression—it seems to me very forcible!

COUNT: It depends on the person. I admit with you that it does not suit many people; but I think it may be granted to me.

ISABELLE: I understand. Heaven created you with so many advantages that the rest of the world owes you humble homage.

COUNT: Hey! Do you take my rival's part?

ISABELLE: By no means; but now that my brother has gone, permit me to speak to you with less constraint and to blame your haughtiness towards Philinte.

COUNT: Ah! I expected from you a juster return, and my vivacity surely proves my love for you.

ISABELLE: Say rather your vanity. Yes, everything makes me think so; you have less love than pride.

COUNT: I am animated by both, and the pride I have supports the interests of outraged love. My pride would not endure the unworthy preference by which I was threatened in your presence. You say it is arrogant and speaks haughtily. But after all, what is my pride? It is honour. It is true that honour demands respect and esteem, but it is generous, sincere, magnanimous; and, to express everything in two words, it is and was always the source of virtue.

ISABELLE: I am convinced of the results of honour ; but has honour so high an opinion of itself that it allows itself to break out in pompous talk ? True honour is less presumptuous ; it does not boast, it waits for others to praise it ; but 'tis vanity, weary of waiting, proud of the rights it arrogates, which thinks to obtain esteem by daring to exact it. But, far from succeeding, vanity offends and irritates and tarnishes the glitter of the most perfect merit.

COUNT: And pray for what purpose do you make this distinction ?

ISABELLE: I leave the task of applying it to you. By undertaking the defence of modesty I maintain that by it we see the difference between real and apparent merit. The one is always trying to shine, the other does shine, without ever striving for it and indeed without knowing it. One is vain and haughty, the other without pride ; the false loves notoriety, the true fears to be conspicuous ; the one aspires to respect, the other merits it. I will say more : those born of noble blood should be distinguished by affability, by a yielding, gentle, considerate spirit ; while pride is generally the effect of borrowed glory. Haughtiness is odious and annoying everywhere. With politeness a man of fortune is a thousand times greater than one of the great who is always formal, who thinks himself made of finer clay, treats with disdain and even rudeness all who seem to him to be of a less noble species, thinks a man is everything when he has blood, and thinks those below him in rank are nothing.

COUNT: A very fine speech, but what does it mean ?

ISABELLE: Lisette will be able to inform you better than I. I leave her the task of interpreting to you my words, which seem already to have irritated you.

COUNT: I beg you will allow me to clear the matter up with you. This girl, after all, is your servant ; do not compromise me.

ISABELLE: When you know her you will not confuse

her with others in her situation, and by your attention to her you will let me see a real proof of your attention to me. She knows my mind, my humour thoroughly ; listen, profit, and merit my heart ! Farewell. (Goes)

COUNT : You remain, then ?

LISETTE : Excuse my boldness and allow me to satisfy myself this once. I must speak to you ; I am ordered to, and I long to do so too, I don't know why.

COUNT : Your familiar tone annoys and offends me.

LISETTE : You are occupied with nothing but your own rank ; but, to interpret what has just been said to you, by playing the great man too much, you appear a very little one.

COUNT : What ! you dare . . .

LISETTE : Yes, I dare, and your extreme error compels me to prove to you to what an extent I am your friend. Sir, you are ruining yourself.

COUNT : How ! I am ruining myself ?

LISETTE : Your pride is apparent. Your haughtiness, your grand airs, reveal what you are in spite of the politeness with which you decorate them. Conceit is a treacherous thing. Isabelle's speech was your portrait and her discernment painted you feature by feature. Though your pride suffer I cannot be silent. I will not say to you : " Alter your character " ; for I know too well a character is not to be changed ; drive away nature, it returns post-haste ; but at least I say to you, try to restrain yourself, in Isabelle's presence make an effort at dissembling, for a time seem to be of her humour and let pride yield to interest. For after all, sir, the glitter of wealth increases that of noble birth. That is my feeling. Whether you profit by it or not, my heart alone dictated this useful lesson. Your irritated conceit seems displeased —I say farewell and I am its servant. (Goes)

COUNT (*alone*) : And so it is now forbidden to know

one's value? To know how to preserve rank is a fault here? Shall these petty merchants treat as arrogance the sentiments inspired by noble birth? If I rely upon my . . . No, I must control myself; love and interest impose their laws upon me. Yes, in Isabelle's presence I must constrain myself; but the unworthy rival whom I am supposed to fear shall this instant see what I am if he dare dispute the object I pursue. I should like to make the acquaintance of this little individual and speak to him in a tone which will make him a little wiser.

(Enter Philinte)

PHILINTE *(making several bows)*: I only trouble you in your meditation, to assure you of my submission, sir. For a long time I have owed you this homage and I cannot put it off longer.

COUNT: Much obliged, sir. And how is it we are acquainted?

PHILINTE: If I have not the honour to be known to you, I shall soon have that of making myself known. My name is not imposing, but . . .

COUNT: That may easily be.

PHILINTE: Such as it is, since it must be spoken, *(Making a low bow)* my name is Philinte.

COUNT: Oh, I had guessed it. I recognised you at once by your bows.

PHILINTE *(with a very humble air)*: I cannot show you by too great a deference how much I honour you.

COUNT: And you are right to do so. But what do you want? Speak openly.

PHILINTE: Valere is my friend; I think you know it.

COUNT: How does that concern me?

PHILINTE: Just now in his presence, if I am to believe what he relates—and I am a little surprised at it—you honoured me . . . with a considerable contempt.

COUNT : He extolled you highly ; I spoke my thought. Is your delicacy wounded ?

PHILINTE (*bowing*) : Oh, sir ! not in the least ; I know myself ; I think people may speak ill of me with justice. But it was added that in regard to Isabelle, you forbade me to return to her house.

COUNT : That is precisely what I wished said to you.

PHILINTE : I thought I might not have understood correctly.

COUNT : Why ?

PHILINTE : You exact a very cruel sacrifice and I very much doubt whether I shall obey you.

COUNT (*sincerely*) : You doubt it, sir ?

PHILINTE : Never until to-day have I felt myself so filled with my love.

COUNT : I shall cure you of it.

PHILINTE : Sir, I do not think so, and I have just told Isabelle and her mother so.

COUNT (*putting on his hat*) : And you come to pay me a compliment like that !

PHILINTE : With distress, but very plainly. Nature, less a mother than a step-mother to me, has formed me very stubborn and obstinate, above all when someone tries to impose his will on me.

COUNT : Obstinacy does not hold out against me, I warn you.

PHILINTE : Mine is very rebellious ; the more it is opposed, the more stubborn it becomes ; and it will never be overcome by conceit.

COUNT : You are very bold to come here and insult me ! A petty gentleman dare to have this audacity !

PHILINTE : I, sir ? I come to ask you a favour.

COUNT : And it is ?

PHILINTE : To allow me the pleasure and honour . . . of cutting your throat !

COUNT : A great favour indeed. You are rash, you

mistake yourself ; but I must comply with your desire. The honour of being one of my rivals raises you to the rank of my peers.

PHILINTE (*mockingly, as he puts on his gloves*) : I am very grateful for this mighty favour and I shall prove to you my heart is worthy of it.

COUNT : No more compliments. I shall prove to you that those who brave me run heavy risks. (*They draw their swords*).

(*Enter Lisimon running*)

LISIMON : Morbleu ! A row like this in my house !
'Sdeath . . .

PHILINTE : Respect disarms me.

LISIMON : Ah ! You can be rebellious, master gentle !

PHILINTE : Sometimes.

COUNT : Fortunately, he is not dangerous.

PHILINTE : That remains to be seen. At least I can assure you that if anyone excludes me from this house, it will not be you.

LISIMON : No, but it will be me.

PHILINTE : I take the liberty of telling you . . .

LISIMON : I think that in such cases the father of a family is master.

PHILINTE : I agree.

LISIMON : And I take the liberty of being such, in spite of my wife and her adherents ; if you do not know it I now tell you. The Count loves my daughter and he has the right to have her ; I have taken the liberty of choosing him as my son-in-law. My daughter agrees and takes the liberty of submitting herself entirely to my authority. So, without flattering yourself against all probability, take your leave and make your bow.

PHILINTE : Sir, I have the honour to reply to that, that your wife is of another opinion.

LISIMON : My wife ! I have given my word ; if my

wife is foolish enough to quibble with me, she shall receive her dismissal now, at the same time as you, since it is in my power.

PHILINTE : I adore your daughter, and her mother's consent permits me to aspire to the happiness of pleasing her. When they turn me away, I shall obey. Until then, I have rights and shall uphold them. (*Goes*)

LISIMON : What obstinancy !

COUNT : This comes from Valere, and I would avenge myself on him were you not his father.

LISIMON : I will have him die under the birch ! or the scoundrel shall leave my house to-night. He has played me a trick . . . Ah, patience, patience !

COUNT : He is a little gentleman filled with conceit.

LISIMON : The portrait of his mother, a fool, a prig, who pretends to wit and has nothing but chatter. Oh ! the wretched woman ! With her affable, composed, sugary air, she is a tyrant, a cold-blooded devil ! Just now she informed me in the presence of her daughter, in eloquent terms, always in level tones but sharp and stinging, that she will leave me if I take you as my son-in-law ; and I answered that I was resigned to suffer this misfortune as soon as she signed, that immediately after her signature, she could go and seek her fortune. At that, tears and swoons. Isabelle went to her aid with moans, and now all three are lamenting together as a ceremony. For when one woman weeps another will weep, and as many as arrive on the spot will weep.

COUNT : So our plan finds numerous obstacles.

LISIMON : I will perform miracles to bring it about ; what I learn from you warms my heart. I didn't think you were such a powerful lord. The devil ! Your father I am told, makes a noble figure in his barony.

COUNT (*tapping his shoulder*) : Come, my dear fellow, come, when you know me better, you will correct yourself

of this familiarity ; you will not say " thou " ¹ to a son-in-law of my sort.

LISIMON : Faith, without thinking, I am carried away by habit. But I will submit to ceremony.

COUNT : Will you promise me ?

LISIMON : Yes, I promise you. ² You ² shall be satisfied.

COUNT : Good ! A fine way of correcting yourself !

LISIMON : Oh ! A truce to your pride ! Let us consult together as to what I am to do to bring about this end.

COUNT : The counsel I shall give you is not to allow anyone here to dare to give his opinion about what concerns me. To cut the whole difficulty with a word, learn to use your authority.

LISIMON : If you would help me . . .

COUNT : No, sir, I swear I will not ; when you are agreed, I am ready to conclude the matter. (*Goes*)

LISIMON (*alone*) : I must be possessed by a demon to endure the airs of such a braggart ; ambition must have turned my head since its power stops me in spite of myself. I shall break it off. But wait. If I follow that line, I shall have given over my authority ; I shall allow my son and my wife to triumph, and henceforth I shall be at her beck and call. A fine honour to husbands ! No, it shall not be. I was surprised by pique, but honour awakens me, excites me to fight, and I'll play the very devil for it !

END OF ACT III

¹ Referring to this familiar custom, already explained.

² He says " thou."

ACT IV

(Lisette and Pasquin enter from two opposite sides of the stage, Pasquin first, walking very fast.)

LISETTE: What! hurry by like that, without looking at me?

PASQUIN: Ah! my queen, forgive me, I didn't see you. Have you anything to say to me by chance?

LISETTE: Yes. Will you enlighten me on certain points?

PASQUIN: Am I able to?

LISETTE: Certainly.

PASQUIN: Then you are very wrong to doubt it.

LISETTE: But you will have to make a great effort.

PASQUIN: You have only to speak. I am a man ready for anything to show you my devotion and to try to please you. What is the great effort your authority imposes upon me?

LISETTE: To tell me the truth.

PASQUIN: Nothing costs me less.

LISETTE: To come to the point—have you ever seen Tufiere Castle?

PASQUIN: Have I seen it? A hundred times. *(Aside)* That's a brave lie!

LISETTE: Is it such a beautiful place as we are told?

PASQUIN: What? It is the finest castle on the Garonne; you can see it from the distance in the shape of a pentagon.

LISETTE: Pentagon? Heavens! what sort of a word is that?

PASQUIN: It's an art term.

LISETTE : I am ready to believe it, but explain to me what the word means.

PASQUIN : That's very easy ; I will describe this superb castle to you, and you can judge what it is like much better than if you saw it. First, there are seven towers between sixteen curtains . . . with two tenaillons placed on three hills . . . which, forming a valley whose peak extends as far as . . . the keep . . . surrounded by a lake . . . and this keep exactly placed . . . under the wall . . . with its three projecting angles . . . forms the pentagon.

LISETTE : A wonderful castle, I must admit.

PASQUIN : Without vanity, I think you would find it beautiful.

LISETTE : And is that the place where the Count's father holds his court ?

PASQUIN : Yes, my queen, and you can rely on it, there is no lord in the whole kingdom upholds his rank with such splendour. Packs of hounds, huntsmen, horses, superb coaches, open table at all times, two equerries, six pages, servants without number and well treated—all this doesn't use up his income.

LISETTE : Then he is a lord with immense wealth ?

PASQUIN : You may judge of it from his magnificence.

LISETTE : I find a little fault in your tales. Either you are lying now, or you lied before.

PASQUIN : How ?

LISETTE : A liar who has no memory soon betrays himself. If I am to believe you, the Count is a great lord ; in another conversation you assured me he had no property.

PASQUIN : Frankly, your argument seems to me unanswerable. I am naturally very truthful. But I obey. At bottom the facts are correct and we have only lied by stretching out the time.

LISETTE : Make this enigma a little plainer, if you please.

PASQUIN : Fifteen years ago what I have said about the father was perfectly true. Since then everything is changed. The old man is in a piteous state and leads an obscure life. But my master still wishes to make a figure in the world and by a pompous description—the fruit of his vanity—has just re-established it on his own authority. But let the matter be secret between us, if you please.

LISETTE : Have no fear. If I were indiscreet I should injure the Count ; but if I have any wishes, it is to be able to help on his happiness. Valere opposes my efforts indefatigably, but I want him to second them. And here, very opportunely, he comes.

PASQUIN : Very opportunely also I shall retire, since he is looking for you here. (*Goes*)

(*Enter Valere*)

LISETTE : Ah ! there you are, sir ! Indeed I am delighted.

VALERE : What ! Do you want to scold me ?

LISETTE : I should like to.

VALERE : And why, if you please ?

LISETTE : About your fine exploits ! My least wishes, you say, are your laws ?

VALERE : It is true.

LISETTE : Yet, in front of the Count you showed me you set little store on them ; and against my wish, your uncontrolled zeal urged Philinte to the last extremity.

VALERE : I told my friend that the Count had been bold enough to risk even threats against him. I said nothing more. He is a man of spirit, who has done nothing but obey his honour.

LISETTE : His honour ? What you say irritates me.

VALERE : For what reason ? Philinte is very worthy.

LISETTE : If you do not use all your efforts to enable the Count to marry your sister and to banish this tiresome

Philinte, I declare to you without mystery or concealment that whether a lady or no, Lisette will never marry you in all her days. I have made up my mind. It is for you to make up yours.

(Enter Lycandre)

VALERE: From what motive. . .

(Seeing Lycandre): What? Must this old face always interrupt our conversations?

LISETTE: I must speak to him.

VALERE: Good-bye, then.

(Goes)

LYCANDRE: I return to find you still in the same company.

LISETTE: Yes, but we were quarrelling. Valere is obstinately set on preventing the young lord who lives here from marrying his sister.

LYCANDRE: And you support Count Tufiere?

LISETTE: Yes, sir, against all and in every way. It is true the Count is so presumptuous it is impossible to submit to his pompous airs; he respects nothing, spares nobody; the more I know him, the more I am astounded by his conceit.

LYCANDRE: Ah! How you distress me!

LISETTE: And why, if you please?

LYCANDRE: But you yourself—why do you take an interest in what concerns him? Is it possible that he is so touched by your readiness to serve him that he is respectful, kind to you?

LISETTE: He has repaid my aid with harshness; I cannot think of it without shedding tears. No matter; I find a thousand charms in serving him.

LYCANDRE: Just Heaven! What an excellent heart on the one side and what an excess of insensibility on the

other ! O detestable pride ! No, there is no vice more fatal to man, more deserving of punishment. In trying to subject everything to his unjust pretentions, he stifles even the voice of humanity.

LISETTE : I feel it.

LYCANDRE : But you, I hope, will be the consolation of an unhappy father.

LISETTE : Sir, you speak of him to me every moment. He was to show himself to my eyes to-day, but he does not appear. Perhaps you were deceiving me ?

LYCANDRE : A little patience, he will soon appear.

LISETTE : Why does he delay these happy moments ? Why does he not come and let me embrace him ?

LYCANDRE : In spite of your affliction, he thinks his presence may distress you.

LISETTE : Me ? How can he think it ?

LYCANDRE : He fears his misfortunes, too deserving of pity, may cool even your love.

LISETTE : Ah ! How little he knows me !

LYCANDRE : And so before he arrives, he wishes you to be informed of his sad experience. Perhaps you hope to see him in his splendour, but you will find him in a bitter condition.

LISETTE : He will be the dearer to me, and far from being troublesome to me, he will see my heart, filled with his misfortune, increase its tenderness and love for him. Before the end of the day, bathed in my tears, he shall be possessed of the little I possess. My zeal shall be the balm for his misfortunes. I will do anything for him. If I have no money, I have good clothes which have been given to me ; I have a diamond left me by my mother. I will sell everything for my father, happy if I can prove to him a thousand times that I love him as I should !

LYCANDRE : Stop. Let me breathe a moment. Give some respite to my spirit. You love your father—he is no longer miserable.

LISETTE: Ah! Since he is so slow in contenting my wishes, tell me what monster caused his misfortune?

LYCANDRE: What monster?

LISETTE: Yes.

LYCANDRE: Pride . . . your mother's pride. Through her extravagance, his wealth was wasted; her pride caused unheard-of miseries.

LISETTE: And how?

LYCANDRE: A woman of some rank disputed precedence with her in a public place, and received so sharp and cruel an affront that she broke out in mortal anger. The lady's husband, enflamed with wrath, attacked your father to avenge the affront, as they were returning from hunting and chose his time so well that they were alone for some minutes. His fury was followed by fatal results. He wished to avenge himself—he lost his life. In a word, in defending himself, your father killed his enemy but with no help but of his own hand armed for his defence. The dead man's relatives pushed their vengeance so far as to claim that this unhappy combat—the result of pure chance—was a murder. Bribed witnesses supported the calumny and were believed. Enraged by this insult, your father defended himself, but in vain. He hid himself. Immediately a sentence was passed condemning him; to escape the scaffold, he fled to England, where a few days later your mother became the companion of his exile with yourself, who had barely left the cradle; and her punished pride brought her to the grave.

LISETTE: O Heaven! What is this you tell me? Then it was not my mother I had with me in the convent, who was so dear to me?

LYCANDRE: It was your nurse. She brought you back and carried out exactly the orders given her by your father two years after his fall—to bring you up in that place, to call herself your mother and to hide your name.

LISETTE: But why this secret? For what reason

leave me ignorant of the blood from which I was born ?

LYCANDRE : 'To render you as modest as you were unfortunate, to spare you the regrets and pain until Heaven softened your misfortunes. So your father ordered and his precaution was necessary to you.

LISETTE : I burn to see him and I tremble for him. How will he dare to show himself to-day after the unjust sentence ? . . .

LISETTE : During his long absence, his faithful friends, certain of his innocence, and powerful at court have been so successful that they have determined him to re-open the case ; and two of the false witnesses on the point of losing their lives have at last admitted their black calumny. Your father has been in hiding nearly two years awaiting the results of this powerful intercession. He has just been given good news—he is almost at an happy end to his terrible sufferings.

LISETTE : Let him not expose himself. I fear some accident, some hidden snare. Would it not be more prudent for us to go and seek him out ? Let us forestall his kindness and impatience by our alacrity. Let us go, sir ; I yearn to embrace his knees and to die of pleasure in such soft transports !

LYCANDRE : You need not go far to taste this joy ; you desire to seek him out and Heaven sends him to you. Yes, my daughter, this is your unhappy father ; he sees you, he speaks to you ; he is before your eyes.

LISETTE (*throwing herself at his feet*) : What ! is it yourself ! O Heaven ! how my soul is ravished ! I taste the sweetest moment of my life !

LYCANDRE : Rise, daughter. I know your heart, and, as I foretold, you will make my happiness. But, alas ! how I dread to see your brother again !

LISETTE : My brother ? And who is he ?

LYCANDRE : Count Tufiere.

LISETTE : I know not where I am ! I cannot breathe ! support me.

LYCANDRE : How abashed he will be when he knows you.

LISETTE : I his sister ?

LYCANDRE : Yes, my child.

LISETTE : There can be no doubt—we are of the same family ; yes, the Count is my brother ; and as soon as I saw him, my heart recognised him through all his contempt. I am no longer surprised by my weakness for him.

LYCANDRE : Your heart anticipated him and in his ingratitude he scorns you ! Ah ! I will profit by the occasion to enjoy his confusion in your presence when the time comes to make you known to him.

LISETTE : Shall I see him again before then ?

LYCANDRE : No. I shall look for him now. The conversation will certainly be sharp and his presumption makes him deserve a severe lesson to his haughtiness from his father.

LISETTE : You will feel his pride, if he does not know you.

LYCANDRE : No. We have seen each other ; he knows me. Go into the house, my child ; someone is coming ; keep silent about all this.

LISETTE (*kissing his hand*) : Father, you may expect everything of my obedience. (*Goes*)

(*Enter Pasquin, who stops and stares at Lycandre*)

LYCANDRE : Is Count Tufiere at home ?

PASQUIN (*abruptly*) : Why ?

LYCANDRE : I want to speak to him.

PASQUIN (*eyeing him up and down*) : Speak to him ? Who ? You !

LYCANDRE : I.

PASQUIN (*contemptuously*) : Impossible.

LYCANDRE : For what reason, pray ?

PASQUIN : He is engaged.

LYCANDRE : Oh, I promise you that however busy he may be, as soon as he hears I wish to speak to him, he will consent.

PASQUIN (*haughtily*) : Eh ? Who are you ?

LYCANDRE : I am . . . for I am losing patience. . . a man very annoyed by your impudence.

PASQUIN (*aside*) : Faith, he's right. I'm always falling into it and must punish myself for it. (*To Lycandre*) I see, sir, that what I say has not the gift of being agreeable to you. But if I am overbearing, I have a good excuse for it.

LYCANDRE : And how is that, if you please ?

PASQUIN : Why, in a word, and without bragging—because I am a fool.

LYCANDRE : Come, a man is not a fool when he recognises his error.

PASQUIN : My master often talks so loftily, is so conceited, that I sometimes become so too without thinking. Happily for me, reason and prudence cut short my fits of impertinence. You see I have lowered my tone. But be good enough to tell me your name, if you please.

LYCANDRE : Tell him, my friend, if he will allow it, that I have come to ask for his answer to a letter which was handed to you for him on my behalf. Has he read it ?

PASQUIN : Yes, sir. Are you by chance the unknown person ?

LYCANDRE : I am.

PASQUIN : I announce you ! Quick, get away from here. I received his reply and I still feel it !

LYCANDRE (*smiling*) : Have no fear for me. He will be more polite in answering me.

PASQUIN : What ! You will expose yourself too. . .

LYCANDRE : Yes, I will run the risk.

PASQUIN : Choose your odds better when you gamble with him.

LYCANDRE : I beg you will hurry.

PASQUIN (*goes and returns*) : Indeed, I am afraid.

LYCANDRE : (*impatiently*) : Ah !

PASQUIN : If you come to any harm, I wash my hands of it. (*Goes*)

LYCANDRE (*alone*) : The master can be judged by his servant's airs. Ah ! If only my son could realise what he is, sometimes blame himself like this man, sooner or later his pride would yield to reason. But I dare not hope.

(*Enter the Count in a furious rage, followed by Pasquin*)

COUNT : Who is this rash man, who is the audacious fellow who dares. . . Ah ! My father !

LYCANDRE : A very touching welcome ; I am edified by it.

PASQUIN (*aside*) : Why, he looks petrified !

COUNT (*taking off his hat*) : A first impulse sometimes deceives us. Forgive me, sir.

PASQUIN : (*aside*) : He asks his pardon !

COUNT : I thought. . . (*aside to Pasquin*) : You may go, Pasquin.

LYCANDRE : Why do you send him away ? Let him remain. I want. . .

COUNT (*pushing Pasquin*) : Go, or you will feel my anger.

LYCANDRE : Stay.

PASQUIN (*rushing away*) : It is too warm here. I do what I'm told.

COUNT : If anyone comes to see me, I am not at home.

LYCANDRE : What does this mean ?

COUNT : I have my reasons.

LYCANDRE : Why do you show such eagerness to send him away from my presence ?

COUNT : Should I expose my father to the eyes of a servant.

LYCANDRE : You fear much more to expose my

poverty ; that is your real motive, and far from being glad to see me near you, your terrified pride blushed at my presence ; it is in torture. Your heart is the accomplice of its confusion, and, puffed-out with conceit, dares not yield itself to the affection which should move it. Ah ! at this moment I see but too well how nature is stifled by false shame. I warned you by letter, in vain ; and I was deceived, thinking that an unknown person would correct you better than an unhappy father whom fortune has rendered contemptible in your sight.

COUNT : Who ? I ! I despise you ! Can you dare to think it ? How much I have a right to be offended by so cruel a suspicion ! Believe that your son respects and honours you.

LYCANDRE : You ? Prove it to me then and at this moment.

COUNT : You may dispose of everything in my power. Speak, what do you exact ?

LYCANDRE : That, in my present state, you make it your honour to banish all mystery and to recognise me as your father in this house. Let us see if you dare.

COUNT : Do you think of the peril to which you expose yourself ?

LYCANDRE : Need I be suspicious of an honest family ? Let us go and see Lisimon ; take me to his daughter.

COUNT : I beg you will not be so quick to expose yourself ; you make them liable to offer you an insult. You do not know the extent of arrogance of a bourgeois, recently titled, and proud of his opulence. He treats the most illustrious blood with disdain if rank is not supported by wealth and display. He measures his respect according to the gifts of fortune ; indigent merit annoys and troubles him, can only draw near him after a thousand efforts to hide its needs under a brilliant exterior. Since your misfortune, my name and my courage have been all my wealth ; and this single advantage, increased by the

reputation of a few actions, has taken the place of wealth and patronage. I have risen by degrees, and though only apparently wealthy, I make a figure equal to my birth ; without this false off-set, neither my rank nor my name would have recommended me to Lisimon.

LYCANDRE : He has been very differently described so me, and I have difficulty in believing you. All this simply tends to hide your conceit. But I am neither vain nor proud, I mean to show myself and go on my way. (*He turns to leave*)

COUNT (*retaining him*) : Wait a few days. It is not a great favour. (*Throws himself at Lycandre's feet*) : I throw myself at your feet and beg it of you.

LYCANDRE : I understand. Vanity on its knees declares to me that an unfortunate father is not worthy of you. Yes, yes, I lost everything through your mother's pride and you have inherited her character only.

COUNT : Ah ! Sympathise then with the noble pride which—it is true—my heart has inherited but too well. For the rest, be assured my greatest wish would be to serve you at the cost of my life. But at least spare a sensitive honour ; for my interest even let us avoid this exposure.

LYCANDRE : You make me pity you ! I see your weakness and by yielding to it I will prove to you my affection ; but on condition that if your pride breaks out in my presence, that very instant. . . .

(*Enter Lisimon*)

LISIMON (*to Count*) : Servant. My dear boy, I was looking for you ; your lack of warmth amazed me. It is time to act. I think, God forgive me, that my wife is becoming reasonable.

COUNT : How ?

LISIMON : She no longer has the great objection to you she had at first. The good lady is wise, for I should have

made a fine disturbance otherwise ! I shall get you a moment's conversation with my worthy spouse ; and then all will go well provided you will be polite to her. Don't fail to do that in any event ; she is as proud as you are and her prejudices. . .

COUNT : I am delighted to see you are correcting yourself.

LISIMON (*putting on his hat*) : You see, my boy, I try to please you.

COUNT : Good !

LISIMON (*taking off his hat*) : And so, sir, the success of the affair lies in your power. And therefore make what I say to you an absolute law.

LYCANDRE : The gentleman speaks justly and to your advantage ; let this marriage be your sole object, and profit by this happy incident.

LISIMON (*to Count*) : Who is this man ?

COUNT (*taking Lisimon aside*) : He is . . . he is my steward.

LISIMON : He looks very thin. From all appearances he hasn't made a fortune out of his stewardship.

COUNT (*to Lisimon*) : He is a man of honour.

LISIMON : He looks it.

LYCANDRE (*aside*) : I see he is deceiving Lisimon by what he says of me. His pride is alarmed at the sight of his father.

COUNT (*to Lisimon*) : Moreover. . .

LISIMON : Well ?

LYCANDRE (*aside*) : I restrain my anger hoping that soon I shall be able to make myself known and to punish my son. My just vexation prepares a scene for him in which at last I shall shame his conceit.

COUNT (*whispers to Lycandre*) : Restrain yourself, for Heaven's sake ! Say nothing to him which will make him suspect who you are.

LYCANDRE : Very well.

COUNT (*returning to Lisimon*): He is a man as economical as he is faithful.

LISIMON (*aloud*): Well, I have brought you good news—don't neglect it. My wife wishes to see you; to gain her over, you must do your duty.

COUNT (*smiling*): My duty!

LISIMON: Yes, certainly.

COUNT: The expression is rather strong.

LYCANDRE (*to Count*): What! Must you fire up like that for a word?

LISIMON (*to Count*): He talks sensibly.

LYCANDRE: It is indeed a matter for quibbling over an expression!

COUNT (*to Lycandre, in a rather haughty way*): But, sir . . .

LYCANDRE (*imperiously*): But sir! I say what should be said. Do what you have to do at once!

COUNT (*aside*): What a martyrdom! He is going to reveal himself.

LISIMON (*to Count*): It seems to me this old man is mighty sharp.

COUNT (*to Lisimon*): It is true. (*To Lycandre*): Your words will undo me. Try to contain yourself at least in this man's presence.

LYCANDRE (*to Count*): Do what he wants or I shall cease to feign.

LISIMON: My wife is waiting for you; come with an air of submission and willingness and ask her to be your friend.

LYCANDRE (*to Count*): Of submission—you understand?

COUNT (*piqued*): Yes, I understand perfectly. (*aside*) O Heaven!

LISIMON: Then you approve what I advise him? Give us your opinion.

LYCANDRE: Yes, I approve it strongly and if he doesn't

go he will make a great mistake. You give him a very good lesson, sir. He needs it. I know him.

COUNT (*aside*) : I shall go mad !

LISIMON (*to Lycandre*) : Then you have served him for a long time ?

COUNT (*to Lisimon*) : Let us go. I regret the time we waste here, sir.

LISIMON (*to Count*) : One moment. (*to Lycandre*) : What does the Count's income amount to ?

LYCANDRE : I cannot tell you what it comes to.

LISIMON : But yet. . .

COUNT (*to Lycandre*) : Tell him. . .

LYCANDRE (*aside to Count*) : I will not lie to him. (*to Lisimon*) : I am obliged by business to leave, sir, and in a short time I shall satisfy you. But you can conclude your business and I dare to flatter myself that in a little time you will both have reason to be very pleased with it. Farewell. (*Goes*)

LISIMON : Your steward plays the master with you. What does that mean ? Hey ?

COUNT : He saw me born and therefore often takes these liberties.

LISIMON : Let us find my wife—and no more of your pride !

COUNT : I will go if you wish ; but what must I say to her ?

LISIMON : What a question ! Why ! Must you be told what to say ?

COUNT : But I am a novice in these undertakings. To request, to solicit ! I don't know how it is done. I wish to ally myself with you ; but think of the respect due my birth ! Speak for me yourself and make my court. That will suffice, I think ?

LISIMON : Is this your return for all my trouble ? Must I come followed by my whole family to offer my daughter to you and ask you on my knees to accept her ?

If you promised yourself you would have her, you can reverse it. My daughter is not worth much if she is not worth asking for. I kiss your hands and recommend myself to your grandeur. Good-bye. (*Goes*)

COUNT (*alone*): How over-bearing these unknown people are ! That is the pride of our parvenus ! It is a small thing that our pride must be sacrificed to their wealth ; we have to bow before the idol to get it. Ah ! accursed fortune ! What have you reduced me to ? Will you humiliate me by the bait of wealth ? Are your favours obtained only by degradations ?

END OF ACT IV

ACT V

LISETTE: Now, Madam, let us clear matters up a little ; we can speak freely here.

ISABELLE: And about what, if your please ?

LISETTE: Your mother is tranquillised and seems less opposed to your desires ; you can now hope to marry your lover. But, far from your displaying that delight you ought to feel when you are at the point of happiness, I have never seen you so sad and thoughtful.

ISABELLE: It is true.

LISETTE: You wanted the Count for your husband ; his love for you has been showed you ; he has asked for you and that proud spirit has bent at last.

ISABELLE: But in what a manner ! The displeasing coldness of his submission, his disdainful smile, his haughty sneering air, his affected silence, all make me understand that his heart found it difficult to condescend to us. My father solicited warmly for him and he scarcely gave two words in support ; had it not been for your influence over Valere, who used his influence to persuade my mother—the Count has acted in such a way that the whole thing would have been broken off. I did what I could to hide my annoyance ; but the more I occupy my thoughts with that moment, the more I feel that I am keenly offended by it. What a sad occurrence for a sensitive spirit !

LISETTE: And so your love is suddenly dead ?

ISABELLE: It is very much cooled.

LISETTE: Speak truthfully now—is there not some inconsistency here ?

ISABELLE: You do not know me. ♦

LISETTE: Oh! Pardon me! And if I give my opinion in good faith. . .

ISABELLE: Well?

LISETTE: You could never become the heroine of any romance, I imagine.

ISABELLE: Do you think it amuses me to be jested at?

LISETTE: I am not jesting; I am telling you the truth. The suspicion of a fault troubles and alarms you. As soon as it is confirmed, your heart is in a rage. Too much fastidiousness is a fault for which you will be punished and perhaps only too soon.

ISABELLE: But can you blame this fastidiousness? Far from showing me any return of affection, the Count distresses me on every occasion.

LISETTE: What! For a little conceit and presumption? That shows the greatness of his soul. He is proud now; but become his wife, and the proud lover will become the tender and yielding husband.

ISABELLE: Can so flattering a thought be permitted me?

(*Enter Valere*)

LISETTE (*to Valere*): You seem very pensive.

VALERE: And I have reason to be so. I dare not now appear in my friend's sight. I have worked for his rival. Even before you two, I cannot help reproaching myself with it. It is a betrayal of which I was incapable if love had not forced me to be guilty of it.

LISETTE: Do you repent it?

VALERE: I should repent it, did I love you less. But at least, I wish you would tell us what motive causes you to show so strong an affection for the Count.

LISETTE: 'The motive is a good one; when you know it, far from blaming me, you will congratulate me.

VALERE: I should like to think so, but please enlighten me.

LISETTE : Until recently I did not know and could not tell it ; now I know and will not tell it.

VALERE : Why do you persist in hiding this from me ? What ! Must a lover find you so discreet ?

ISABELLE (*to Valere*) : And so you really love Lisette ?

VALERE : I love her and I am proud of it.

ISABELLE : Such an attachment proves your discernment more than ever ; but what is your object ? What do you hope for ?

LISETTE : Allow us to keep silence about that.

ISABELLE : I consent gladly and make this effort until I know how my own fate is decided.

VALERE : It is decided.

ISABELLE : Good Heavens !

VALERE : My father is dictating the marriage contract with the notary.

ISABELLE : And my mother no longer opposes it ?

VALERE : No. You owe this sudden change to me.

(*Enter Lisimon*)

LISIMON (*to Isabelle*) : Now, then, let us enjoy ourselves. At last for better or worse the enemy has yielded ; I have won the battle. I feared an outburst, but your mother is going to sign the contract. She has sent Philinte away ; and I am waiting for the notary to finish up this important affair. Except for certain points which have to be agreed upon, I can see nothing else to hinder us. This evening you will be a Countess, my girl !

ISABELLE : This evening ?

LISIMON : Without delay.

ISABELLE : There is no need for haste. This affair deserves a little attention ; I have reflected on it.

LISIMON : Reflected ? Are you going to make another scene, Miss, and go back on your word as you have done in five or six other projects which have failed ? Do you

think the Count will take it lightly ? Is he the man to put up with your fancies ?

VALERE : But, father, after all. . .

LISIMON : But, son, after all, do you think I shall listen to the opinion of a coxcomb ? What ! I have accomplished to-day this incredible miracle of making my wife reasonable (a thing which has never been seen before and never will be again) and my children are to make my labours useless ! So fine a master-piece to be thrown away ! No, parbleu ! Be careful not to heat my spleen or you will have cause to repent it. My just anger will make itself felt.

LISETTE : That is speaking like the father of a family, sir. Dispose of your daughter ; don't leave her to her thoughts. It is for you to decide on such occasions.

ISABELLE : What, Lisette ? . . .

LISETTE : Monsieur Lisimon has pronounced the oracle ; there can be no further hindrance to its accomplishment. If he destines you for the Count, this plan must be carried out, in spite of the whole human race !

LISIMON : This girl delights me. Yes, my dear Lisette, if you were a little less discreet, you would be perfect.

LISETTE : Good advice.

LISIMON : Yours has just delighted me, I must kiss you to thank you.

LISETTE : Reserve this tender outburst, if you please, until I am an accomplished¹ girl.

LISIMON : I should wait too long. My gratitude must absolutely express itself at once.

VALERE (*detaining him*) : Take care, father, you are overheating yourself.

LISIMON (*repulsing him*) : Master Doctor, it's not your affair. Whether I overheat myself or not, have the

¹ " Une fille accomplie " : there are several sous-ententes here it means " an accomplished girl," a " girl who has nothing more to learn," and also " a regular baggage."

goodness not to take on yourself the care of my health. (*aside*) : I think the scoundrel is jealous of Lisette, and I suspect a secret intrigue between them. (*to Valere*) : I want to find something out. Let us know. . .

VALERE : Here is your notary.

LISIMON (*to Valere who is about to go*) : Ah ! Good. No, no, you stay here. In a moment we will have this out.

(*Enter M. Josse*)

LISIMON : Come in, Monsieur Josse.

M. JOSSE : Is this the place of assembly ?

LISIMON : Yes.

M. JOSSE : Let us read the draft. Except for three clauses, sir, I have laid down your mutual interests. Is this the bride ?

LISIMON : Almost. She is my daughter.

M. JOSSE (*looking at her through his spectacles*) : Ah ! That is the material to form a fine family. And where is the bridegroom ?

ISABELLE : I don't know.

M. JOSSE : What ! Keep you waiting ! Oh ! That's not right ; and you deserve. . .

LISIMON : Here he is. Sit down, Monsieur Josse ; let us sit down too.

(*Enter Count. All seated except Lisette*)

M. JOSSE (*at a table, puts on his spectacles and reads*) :
" In presence of. . . "

LISIMON (*to Isabelle, who is talking to Lisette*) : Listen !

M. JOSSE (*reads*) : " The King's counsellors, undersigned notaries, were present. . . "

LISIMON (*to Valere, who is making signs to Lisette*) : What ! Will you not be silent ? Is this a time to chatter ? Come here, Valere. Leave that girl alone,

M. JOSSE (*to Count*): Your name, if you please, your titles, your rank? I did not know them and I left a space for them.

COUNT: I will dictate them to you. Pray forget nothing. You have left very little room for them.

M. JOSSE: The margin can be used, see how wide it is.

COUNT: Write then. (*dictates*): Most high and mighty lord. . .

M. JOSSE (*rising*): Sir, remember that is only used by. . .

COUNT: No arguing, please, I ask you.

M. JOSSE (*writes*): And mighty lord.

COUNT (*dictates*): My lord Carloman, Alexander, Caesar, Henry, Jules, Armand, Philogene, Louis. . .

M. JOSSE: What a string! Faith, my memory boggles at so many names. (*repeats*): Philogene, Louis, . . . And?

COUNT (*dictates*): Of Mont-sur-Mont.¹

M. JOSSE (*repeats*): Sur-Mont.

COUNT (*dictates*): Chevalier.

M. JOSSE (*repeats*): . . . lier.

COUNT: Go on. Baron of Montorgueil.²

M. JOSSE: Orgueil.³

COUNT (*pompously*): Good. Marquess Tufiere.

LISIMON: What! are you a Marquess?

COUNT: It is really my father; but since I shall have the title after his death I take it beforehand in my marriage-contract.

LISETTE (*slapping him on the shoulder*): Well done, my boy! It is allowed you! (*to Isabelle*): My compliments, Marchioness!

M. JOSSE (*to Count*): Is that all?

COUNT (*rising*): All? Lord. . .

M. JOSSE: Et cetera. This will never end!

¹ "Mountain on Mountain." ² "Baron of Mount-pride."
³ "Pride."

COUNT: Put "Lord of other domains" in very large letters.

ISABELLE (*half aside to Lisette*): In letters of gold.

LISETTE (*to Isabelle*): Hush!

ISABELLE (*as before*): I cannot be silent. I will not lend myself to such conceit.

LISETTE (*as before*): It is a common failing of people of quality. Very often their titles are all they possess.

M. JOSSE (*to Lisimon*): And now you, sir. (*reads*): Messire Antoine Lisimon. . .

COUNT (*with an air of surprise*): Antoine?

LISIMON: Yes.

COUNT: What! Is that your name? Antoine! Is it possible?

LISIMON: Parbleu! Why not?

COUNT: It is a very bourgeois name.

LISIMON: No more than others. I think its patron-saint is as good as yours.

COUNT (*loftily*): Go on, sir, go on. Your titles. That is the main point.

LISIMON: Who? I? I have none.

COUNT: What! you have no lordship?

LISIMON: Ah! I remember one. Write, please. (*dictates*): Antoine Lisimon, esquire.

COUNT: Nothing more?

LISIMON: And sovereign lord . . . of a million crowns.

COUNT: You are jesting! Is money a title?

LISIMON: Brighter than yours; in my desk I have bills payable to bearer which I think more of than of old parchments, mere food for rats.

M. JOSSE (*aside*): He's right.

COUNT: For my part I think nobility. . .

M. JOSSE: Oh! we bourgeois are all for money. (*to Lisimon*): Now, what is the dowry?

LISIMON: The son-in-law I am taking urges me to bring it up to nine hundred thousand francs.

M. JOSSE (*to Count*): That is a very magnificent title for the bride, which will support your ancient nobility!

COUNT (*aside to M. Josse*): Master paper-keeper! yes, money does support us; but we purify the source it comes from.¹

M. JOSSE: And what settlement is the contracting wife to have?

COUNT: What settlement, sir? Twenty thousand francs a year.

LISETTE (*aside*): My brother is magnificent! In any case, I know well if he gives a lot, he binds himself to nothing.

M. JOSSE (*to Count*): And on what do you assign it?

LISIMON: Yes!

COUNT: On the Barony of Montorgueil.

M. JOSSE (*rising*): There, the matter is completed.

LISIMON: Now let us sign. The marriage shall take place as soon as your father comes to Paris.

COUNT: My father, you say? There is no use waiting for him. He can never get here; he has been in bed with gout for six months.

LISETTE (*aside*): Indeed my brother sometimes lies very well!

COUNT: We will visit him after the wedding.

LISIMON: It is a journey I shall make with great pleasure.

(*Enter Lycandre*)

COUNT (*aside*): Ah! Here he is! Good Heavens! what an incident.

LISIMON: What do you want? Parbleu! It's the steward.

¹ When Madame de Grignan married her daughter to a financier's son she remarked publicly at Versailles that "good lands need manuring sometimes." The nobles generally tried to pretend they were conferring the obligation in these mercenary marriages.

LYCANDRE (*to Count*): I have come to know, my son. . .

VALERE and ISABELLE: His son!

COUNT (*aside*): I shall die of shame.

LISIMON: And so you deceived me? Answer me, Count.

COUNT (*to Lycandre*): What! do you dare show yourself in that state?

LYCANDRE: My appearance can never do anything but honour you. My arrival here alarms and annoys you; but learn that my rights come before your fortune. Render them homage, ungrateful boy, by a more affectionate welcome.

COUNT: Ah! Can I, at this moment?

LISIMON: Baron of Montorgueil, is this the superb and brilliant display you made so much of just now?

LYCANDRE: The state in which I appear and his confusion are the punishment of excessive pride. I reserved it for him. (*To Count*): I bless my misery since it humiliates you and avenges a father. Ah! far from blushing, you should soften my misfortunes. Speak, acknowledge me.

ISABELLE (*to Lisette*): You are in tears, Lisette?

LISETTE (*to Isabelle*): You shall know the reason soon.

LYCANDRE (*to Count*): I see your vanity is in opposition to your feelings, but I shall quell it. Fall at my knees or receive my anger and my curse!

COUNT: I cannot resist this venerable voice. Well! you desire it? Make me contemptible; enjoy the pleasure of my confusion. Proud as it is, my heart no longer denies you. Yes, I am your son, you are my father. Render your affection to this sincere change. (*Gets on his knees to Lycandre*): It costs me dear to have deserved henceforth all your kindness.

LISIMON (*to Lycandre*): Faith, he is right. From what

he has just done, I would swear, morbleu ! that you are his father.

LYCANDRE (*raises the Count and embraces him*) : When I searched your heart, I trembled, I shuddered ; but despite your pride, nature has spoken. What delight this triumph brings me at this moment ! And now I must end your fears and forget your faults which have been punished enough. My son, be reassured ; our misfortunes are over. Heaven has at last become more kindly, and has confounded the malice of my enemies. Our august monarch¹ has learned of my misfortunes and the base attacks of my persecutors ; by a just sentence he has ended my misery. He gives me back my honour ; he gives you back a father re-established in his rights, his property, his rank, in all the splendour which should attach to his blood. I have just received news of it and it is an extreme joy to me to announce this to you now.

COUNT : What do I hear ? Just Heaven ! Fortune, your favour now makes happiness equal merit and virtue ! Yes, you give me back my property, my rank and my birth, and henceforth I shall enjoy them !

LYCANDRE : Become more modest as you become more fortunate.

LISIMON : Well said. I congratulate you both. I did not wait for what I have just heard to choose your son as my son-in-law, because pride apart, he is a good fellow. Here is the marriage contract ; sign it.

LYCANDRE : Although our fortune has changed its aspect, I must thank you for your kindness to him ; and to acquit myself of it the better, I mean to ally myself doubly with you.

LISIMON : How ?

LYCANDRE : I offer you my daughter for your son.

VALERE (*to Lisette*) : I am lost !

¹ Louis XV. Compare the last act of *Tartuffe*.

LISIMON : It is a great honour for my family. You see me very agreeably surprised. I accept the proposal. But is your daughter in Paris ?

LYCANDRE : Certainly. Come here, Constance, and receive the husband. . .

LISIMON : You must be joking. That's Lisette.

LYCANDRE : The name was the cause of your error. Come daughter ; Count, embrace your sister.

LISIMON : His sister a waiting-woman !

LYCANDRE (*to Count*) : Such an adventure is a certain proof of the freaks of fortune. Thank Heaven, your sister is worthy of her blood. Her virtue, rather than I, returns her to her rank.

VALERE : What a lucky ending ! I shall die of joy !

ISABELLE (*to Lisette*) : I share in the happiness Heaven sends you.

LISETTE (*to Count*) : Confirm my happiness by acknowledging me.

COUNT : I consider it a pleasure, an honour.

LISIMON (*to Lycandre*) : And on my side I wish my family to give your daughter a suitable rank. Distinction can be acquired with money ; I am negotiating for a marquisate and I want my son to embellish his wife with it. Close with the offer this evening, M. Josse. Go and see the vendor ; and see that my son wakes up a Marquess to-morrow morning. (*to Count*) : Are you satisfied ?

COUNT : I could never be more so.

LISIMON : Good. Then we'll have a double wedding.

ISABELLE (*to Count*) : My heart pleads for you, but I dread your haughtiness.

COUNT : Love will see to it that our humours agree. Depend on his power. What must I do to please you ? Your tastes, your feelings shall form my character.

LYCANDRE : My son is proud but his heart is excellent ; that makes up for all.

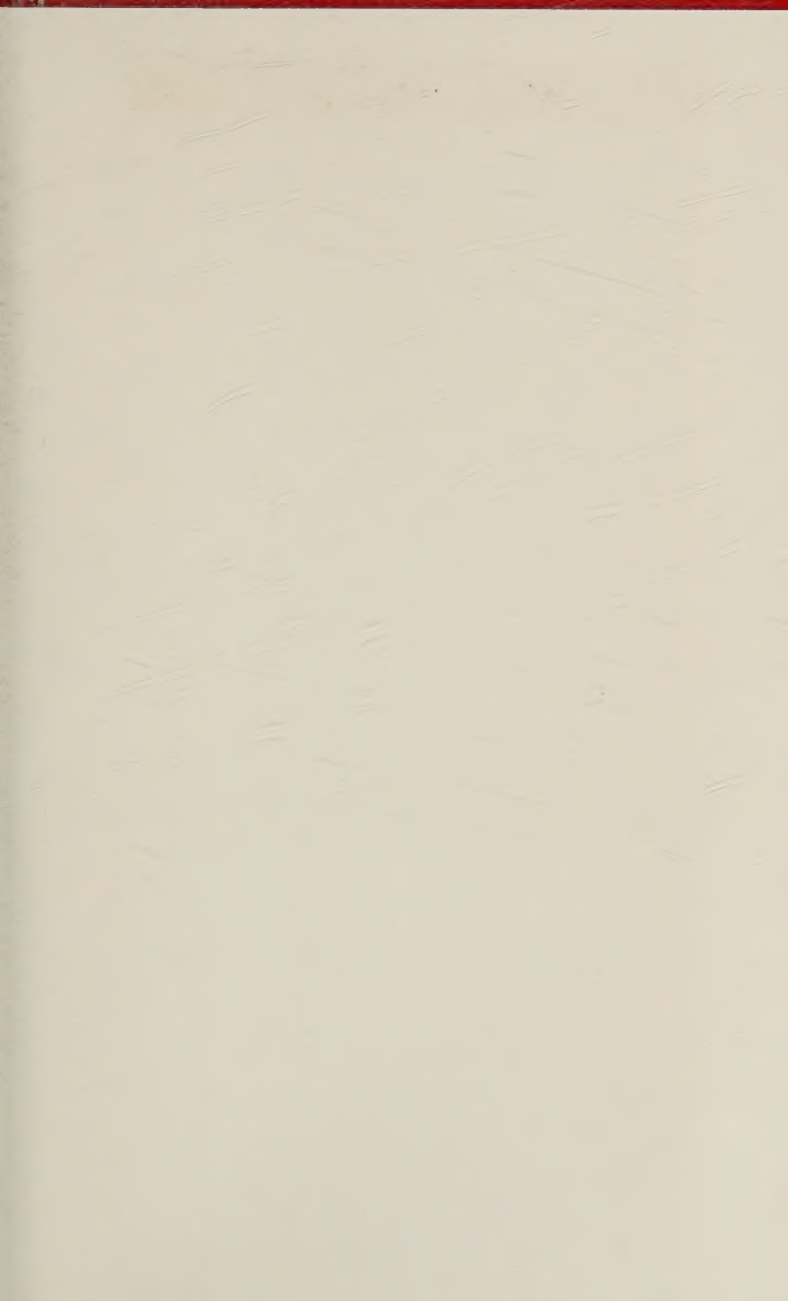
LISIMON : Yes, you are right. If he still remains a

little vain-glorious, a man of so much merit may be a little conceited.

COUNT: No, I desire only to triumph over myself; I shall follow the dictates of respect and love. They have opened my eyes—may they help me to conquer myself! We should make ourselves beloved; I am now convinced of it and I feel that conceit and presumption achieve nothing but indignation and hatred.

END

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